



THE WAYFARERS.

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" Life, I repeat, is energy of Love
Divine or human ; exercised in pain,
In strife, and tribulation ; and ordained,
If so approved and sanctified, to pass,
Through shades and silent rest, to endless joy."

WORDSWORTH.

THE WAYFARERS;
OR, TOIL AND REST.

BY

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PREFACE.

LABOUR is a large subject, and common to us all. From the cradle to the grave we all labour in some sort or other, for the soul travails as well as the body. But how best to suffer, and to do, while passing through this working-day world,

“As ever in our great Taskmaster's eye ;”

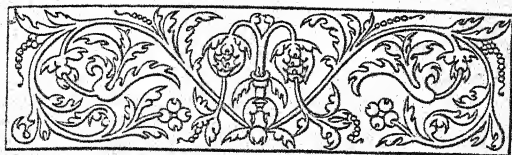
the self-devotion essential to effort of any kind, as exemplified in the boy Pierre ; the circumstances most favourable to honest labour ; and such dispositions as are adverse to it ; it is the object of the following pages to show. Let me hope that, however imperfect the lesson, or the manner of conveying it, there may yet stand forth from them some not displeasing forms of reality and truth.

The scenes occupy the few short months of the Pyrenean summer.

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CHAPTER I.

THE HOUR OF VICTORY.

“ More are men’s ends mark’d, than their lives before.”

RICHARD II.

IN a mountain fastness, which had formerly been devoted to religious uses, but since the war in the Peninsula had been garrisoned by irregular bands for the defence of the most northern parts of Catalonia, the women and sick belonging to the army were left, after the capture of the convent by the French troops. It was a wild, romantic spot, inaccessible, except by steep rocky paths ; and the bold and savage crags which towered high above the building, seemed as if planted there by nature to guard the holy place. Its lofty eminence, looking down upon the rich plain of Barcelona, and in the distant horizon upon the waters of the Mediterranean, was suited, by its commanding situation, for the watch-tower alike of the soldier and the meditative recluse. And here, where prayers and alms, beside the rugged precipices, had

been its only defence, the open-mouthed cannon now stood to guard the difficult approach.

A motley set—of men, rough care-nothing fellows, pale, haggard, despairing creatures, moaning out their last hours, a few less sickly, doing the last sad offices for their suffering brethren, of women, worn out with fatigue, but still strong in their hidden energies, and a few children—was gathered within the sacred retreat, where the bare-footed monk had once alone trod, and still kept his precarious hold, by hiding in the nests or hermitages amongst the clefts of the rocks, until a more ruthless invader should dispossess him of the shelter.

And here a gentle mother kept watch over her two sleeping boys, while in prayer she commended them, with herself and her husband, to the protection of Almighty God. She was a soldier's wife, and had shared his wanderings and his blessed hours of rest. A mighty presence had hitherto shielded him from harm, but she knew that the same arm which had so often warded off the blow, might yet, one day, permit it to fall; and she strove, even while shunning the thought, to gather strength to meet the fatal message, if indeed it should come at last. "Spare me, good Lord!" broke from her lips. "Perhaps Victor thinks on me at this moment, and prays for me; would he not say, 'Oh, put your trust in God!'" She rose and left the bedside.

The morning sun at length shone brightly, waking the sleeping children, and filling their little hearts with joy. "Look, look, Roland!" said Pierre; "see how the sun shines! Shall we not have sport to-day?"

"Yes, brother, yes," said Roland. "But I cannot feel glad now. I had an ugly dream last night."

"You have always ugly dreams. You think such foolish thoughts! Why don't you try to forget them?"

"I cannot, brother dear. Besides, the dream I had last night was all about papa."

"About papa! What made you think of him?"

"I saw him yesterday before he went away. He looked very grave, and then he kissed mama, and tears came in her eyes. He kissed me, too, and said, God bless you! and asked for you, Pierre."

"He found me in the garden. But papa often goes away and comes again."

"Perhaps he will not come to-day. I saw him in my dream turn pale and fall. And, hark! the guns are firing!"

Then the countenance of Pierre suddenly changed, for he had a tender though a manly heart, and he knew not at first what to think or what to say. But presently recovering himself, he said: "We should not fear, Roland. Mama tells us so. Let us say our prayers!"

The two little brothers knelt down, and Pierre repeated his morning prayer and comforted Roland; and when their mother entered the room he met her with an open and cheerful countenance, but looking inquiringly in her face, if he might read there any anxious or disturbing thoughts. She was calm as usual, and embraced them both; and sitting down, took Roland on her knee. He, like a tender infant, nestled in her bosom, and was for a while consoled. But his little heart was not at rest, only he forbore

to speak his fears, because Pierre had told him he must not grieve his mother.

Then, while the dismal sounds of war came from afar, she said, "Let us haste and finish our morning task. You, Pierre, repeat the 23rd Psalm. And, dear Roland, join your little hands and listen."

Pierre began in a low quiet voice, and spoke distinctly till he came to the 4th verse: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Here his voice faltered, and Roland's eyes filled with tears. The mother perceiving the meaning of their emotions, and suppressing her own, said, "Who are the enemies we should most fear?"

"The enemies of our salvation."

"And who are the good soldiers of Jesus Christ?"

"Those who fight manfully."

"To them death is only a shadow, a terrible one, but only a shadow; like something we perceive in a dark room, and know not what it is, and our heart trembles we cannot tell why. But we must pass by this fearful thing, and so must death be passed, ere we can reach that land where shadows flee away."

"I do not fear, mama. Papa does not fear."

A fresh chord was struck on the poor mother's heart.

"You are afraid of what death will take away from you," she said.

"Yes, I was thinking I should not like it to take away you, nor papa, nor Roland, nor good Nannette."

"But we cannot live here for ever, Pierre. Even the most patient man on earth said, 'I would not

live alway,' for he knew of a better land than this to dwell in. And because we do not like to part with those we love, God does not consult our wishes, but takes his children home, when they have finished the work that he gave them to do."

There was enough in this idea to occupy Pierre's childish thoughts, and he was silent.

Meanwhile, the tide of battle rolled on. And towards the close of day, a herald was seen bearing the tidings of victory; his face blackened with smoke, his eyes bloodshot, his voice husky, speaking in a hurried and confused manner, upon a charger reeking with foam, whose dilated nostrils and wild starting eyes told the terror and excitement of the way.

Can this be one who has good news to tell? thought Pierre. Poor child! He had yet to learn more nearly the sorrow that attends upon deeds of glory. And he was ignorant that every courageous effort in the path of duty, each difficult act of self-denial, needs the warrior's arm, as in the day of battle, to overcome interposing obstacles; and that, like the faithful soldier, we must bear our affections to be laid waste, and the axe to be laid to the root of the tree, ere the fight is fought and the victory won. But he was already training in the school of life, like one destined to take an early part in it, and nothing was lost to his reflecting mind.

At nightfall there appeared to the sorrowful gaze of both mother and children a litter, on which lay the form of a wounded soldier.

"Bear him gently," said the heart-broken wife, in a voice of entreaty. There was no need of such

a caution to the faithful comrades of the dying hero. They laid him down, as tenderly as a nurse lays her sleeping infant upon its couch ; and after pausing to take one last look at their beloved commander, and wiping away a tear, it might be, from their rough honest faces, they retired, with quiet and saddened footsteps, from the death-bed of valour.

The shades of darkness closed over the sufferers in that silent chamber. The wound the officer had received was mortal ; and nothing could be done, but to soothe and cherish the short remainder of a life which ebbed very fast away.

"Anna," he said, in faltering accents, "when I am gone you will leave this place. But if memory is permitted in another state, I shall often revisit it in spirit, and you, in like manner, will revisit it also. Bring hither thoughts of comfort, such as if I were then with you, I should speak."

"There was a feeble lamb in a flock, and the shepherd folded it in his arms, and carried it over hill and dale to a green pasture and a fold where no keen blast could penetrate. And the little lamb was happy, and knew not how to manifest its gratitude, except by joy and playfulness. Therefore, when the sun shone, it gambolled around the shepherd, and tried in very happiness to express its love. And after a while it grew strong, and needed no longer the shepherd's care, and was sent forth to feed with the flock on the wild waste. Then the heart of the poor lamb was cast down, and it thought sorrowfully. Has the kind shepherd forgotten to be gracious?"

Will he no longer show me his tender mercy? But there came a time when the sheep must seek another pasture-ground. And the shepherd went before, calling each one by name, and leading them by difficult paths towards a better country. So the lamb heard him speak her own name, and knew that she was not forgotten."

This simple allegory, feebly spoken, conveyed a touching meaning and tender sympathy to the heart of the listener.

"I have been much blessed, and therefore sorrow has the keener edge, since, being strange to me, I feel it as for the first time."

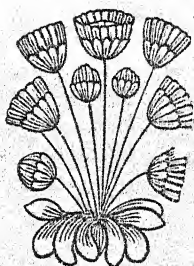
"Sorrow will grow lighter, and the path of life shorter and easier day by day, my Anna," said her husband; "and see how soon the end comes!"

"I see only the lonely way," she replied.

At this moment the door of the room was softly opened, and the faithful nurse, who was herself a soldier's wife, entered, leading Pierre and Roland by the hand. They approached the bedside of their dying parent, and he with difficulty placed his hand on the head of each and blessed them. Then turning to their mother, he added, with a failing voice, "Teach them 'what is the victory that overcometh the world, our faith'—to be pure in heart—to love God. May Christ welcome them and us—'Come, ye blessed of my Father.'"

The voice ceased, and ere the day dawned the light of heaven had broken upon the departed spirit. And thus the warrior-chief breathed forth his soul to

God, and his body found a solitary sepulchre, within the walls of the convent, apart from the brotherhood, whose faith forbad them to afford the corpse of the heretic a kindred grave.



CHAPTER II.

THE HOMEWARD-BOUND.

"Our life was but a battle and a march."

WALLENSTEIN.



T early morning, of a day which gave promise of great brightness and beauty ere its course was run, there stood at the gate of the convent a party of men and horses prepared for a journey. The animals were stout hardy creatures of the middle size, such as are bred in mountainous districts, but with sleek skins and long manes and tails of fine soft hair, peculiar to the warmer climate of the Spanish peninsula. The men wore picturesque dresses, not accurately fitting or adorning their persons, but suited to their profession as guides in a wild intricate region, where little except convenience is thought of, and they had large slouching hats to protect them from the sun's rays. Besides this, they carried pistols in their sashes, and large clasp-knives with rough wooden handles suspended by a cord to the button-hole of their jackets, giving them a ferocious appearance, not exactly agreeing with that of the party they were about to escort. A man of grave demeanour, who yet bore the aspect of having lived and acted in stirring scenes, arranged the mantles and

small travelling equipage which could in prudence be allowed to encumber the travellers. And this done, he returned within, and re-appeared, preceding his widowed mistress, who, with her children, was about to make her way forth to other scenes that might prove more peaceful and secure. She was a noble lady, calm, gentle, and loving in the midst of grief, but not unmoved, for it might be seen that she closed the hood, which almost concealed her features, more completely as she came forth, and her hand trembled as she took the reins from the horse's neck, and prepared to encounter fresh perils upon the mountain pathway.

They descended to the plain and crossed the river, flowing onward as it might have flowed a thousand years before, and, ascending the first acclivity, came upon level ground, which gave an extended prospect of the scene below. The vestiges of war were gone, for they had chosen this secluded way as the only safe road through the disturbed districts. The sun shone out in all its rising splendour, and Nature seemed to rejoice anew.

No change occurs in the visible creation like that which death makes in the homes of men! And thus pondered the poor widow. But she did not yet realize the whole painful truth. The breath of heaven had passed over her earth, and the flower of her heart was gone, and its freshness and beauty would be known no more; but the past was still present to her memory—the tones and the words of love were living still, and she rested on the unchangeable mercy of God, as “the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” How gracious is that Providence which imparts its gifts and

its judgments by measure unto us as we are able to bear them in our earthly state ; and, for our better support, has linked our souls by divine affinity to that which is eternal !

Pierre and Roland had hitherto been almost silent, absorbed in the strangeness of the scene—the new world upon which they were entering. They awoke from their quiet dreams at the sight of land and river stretched out before them, and imagination, which is so often busy in childhood, and is found, amidst sterner qualities, in characters of a deep and thoughtful nature, began to stir the mind of Pierre, and to find a vent for itself in words. The two children sat side by side, amongst baggage nicely balanced, so as to afford them a secure and comfortable seat ; and the easy rate at which they proceeded enabled them to converse and to exchange affectionate intercourse after the playful manner of brotherhood. Mirth indeed seemed banished even from their joyous spirits, but life was still glad for them, and they could not be altogether unhappy.

“ I should like to be upon that glorious river,” said Pierre ; “ how it dashed along as we crossed the bridge ! and see ! it winds a long way off, zigzag over the plain. How the sun shines on it, as if it were the very path to heaven by which dear papa is gone ! ”

“ It makes me very sad to think of him,” returned Roland ; and his gentle eyes filled with tears. “ Are not you sad, brother ? ”

“ Yes ! But I am thinking of what papa said to us, and that river reminds me of it.”

“ How does it do so, brother ? ”

“ It looks pleased, as if it had gained the victory

he was speaking of. A little while ago it was angry as it passed the bridge, and in such haste, as if afraid of being hindered, but now it is smooth and bright, as if nothing had ever been the matter with it. And papa is happy too, because he has overcome all his enemies."

"Have I an enemy, brother?"

"Yes; fear is your enemy. And mine? I know what mine is. He was very busy with me last night. I strove to keep him out, but he fought his way in, and then I thought God ought not to have taken away dear papa. I was vexed and almost angry, like that tumbling river, and I cried till my pillow was wet with tears. But papa used to say, we have all an enemy within ourselves to conquer."

Roland put his arm round his brother's neck, as if the thought of such an enemy made him tremble, and he was glad to rest his helplessness on Pierre's superior strength and wisdom; for he believed his was the strong arm which could protect him in all dangers.

"What will you be when you grow a man, Pierre?"

"A soldier."

"And die like papa!"

"I have something to do first. You know mama said, we must all die when we have done our work."

"But perhaps you will not have time to finish it!"

"Yes! God gives us all time, I suppose. Only we do not know whether our work will be long or short. Oh, I wish I could ride on that beautiful river!" he exclaimed again.

"How slowly we travel along!"

The little cavalcade, towards mid-day, reached a

platform of green turf, where the guides proposed to rest for two or three hours, to escape the fervour of the noontide sun. All were glad of repose. Even the untiring mountain-steeds snuffed the fresh pasture with keen delight after their morning's toil; and the children rejoiced, in this timely freedom from restraint, at the prospect of a gambol on the smooth greensward. The carpet was soon spread for the lady and her attendants, the viands were produced; and when the meal was finished, the brothers stole apart, and reclined beneath the shade of a large spreading chesnut, with David, the favourite and devoted servant before mentioned, who beguiled the time with tales of former days and many a characteristic anecdote of his own, to make the past the more present to his youthful hearers.

"Tell us of the old times, Davy," said Pierre. "Begin with the house in which you lived near Sedan, or your old grandmother."

"When I was a self-willed lad, until your dear father taught me better," replied David. "I think I see him now as I saw him first, a fair, handsome youth, mild and winning in his gentleness, but whom we all revered. He came one day to our cottage, to ask my grandmother to spare me to fish with him in the mountain-stream that was collected into a pool, as a preserve for fish near our dwelling. 'And trust me, Rose,' he said, 'David shall return by the time the sun sinks behind the hill-top.' 'Ah! I'll trust you,' said my grandmother; 'I never knew my young master's word fail.' He took me into his service not long after, and I went with him to the military college at —, where he studied his profession; and, from time to

time, we returned to the home he loved, until he was sent upon foreign service."

"Had he a brother or a sister, Davy?"

"No. He was an only child, and never thought to end his days so far from home. There was the old house by the side of the hill, a large red-brick mansion, that had been in your grandmother's family from generation to generation, and his father and mother, who doted on him; but he was not born to live and die in such an out-of-the-way place." Pierre wondered what sort of a place it could be.

"Had you nothing to do but to fish there?"

"There was not much else to do but to plough, or to reap, or to cut timber for firewood, as it may be here, or to drive the market-cart to the neighbouring town with fruit and vegetables. But my grandmother sent me to school to learn writing and French, that I might forget my mother-tongue as quickly as possible."

"You did not like school, I have heard you say."

"I did not like restraint of any kind. I loved my own way better than any other."

"But what did papa do?"

"Oh! he never seemed dull, or to want employment. And if you missed him, you had but to seek him in the long walk, one that was called after him, Victor's walk, because he would spend days and hours there, reading and walking up and down, or sitting in an alcove, where he kept some of his favourite books. It was a pleasant walk in summer beneath the old elm trees; and pleasant enough to sit there and look down upon the river just below, with the poplar trees alongside of it. I have spent many an hour watching the

midges as they danced above it, or the leaves as they fell in autumn. But I wondered what your father could find to occupy so much of his time and thoughts there."

"He was thinking of the battles he might live to fight, perhaps," said Pierre.

"Or of those he had read of, and was fighting them over again in his own mind, may be."

"Did you think he would be so great a man, Davy?"

"Could any one foresee that, or the times that were coming upon us?"

"But how did he teach you to become better?"

"I never perceived how unlike I was to him until the wound I received in our first engagement cast me upon a bed of sickness."

"Tell me how it happened."

"I have not much recollection of how it happened. I was stunned, and carried to the rear at once. But I have often thought since it was to me like being stopped short when one gets into the wrong path, and turned into the right way again. I remember your father would come and sit by my bedside and read the Bible to me when I was able to listen to him. And when I saw him sit there so calm and saint-like, I wondered if it could be the same man I had seen so lately lead his column to victory. And then I felt there was one battle-field he had made acquaintance with, in the long walk at home, that I knew nothing of."

And here the faithful servant wiped the tears that forced their way into his eyes at the remembrance of his beloved master, and Pierre sank into deep thought.

"I wish I could be like papa," he said, recovering himself.

"That wish made me a different man," replied Davy. "But I see our guides are preparing for departure, and we must be going."

They pursued their journey, and, as they travelled, Pierre made rapid advances, in his own fancy, towards the great and the good he hoped hereafter to accomplish. • The day wore away, and before nightfall they reached a solitary house, which, by the sign and notice it displayed, might have been supposed a place of refreshment for wayfarers; but it had few claims to such a title, wanting most of the comforts and conveniences which usually belong to the road-side inns of more civilized countries. Our travellers were too weary, however, to regard with much nicety the sort of welcome they received; and sleep soon made amends for shortcoming comforts, to all excepting the poor widow. And even her grief was of that passive unresisting nature that yields without difficulty to gentler influences, or perhaps its very weight oppressed her; and, after a while, she too sank to rest with submission and in peace.

And the morning came, and the night returned, of many days like the one that was just gone. The little company moved slowly on, through wild and picturesque scenery; now traversing the broad valley, now climbing the rocky defile and steep ascent, then reaching the woody glade, and pausing to gain strength for fresh toils. And the rough guides sang songs, and made merry as they neared the end of their journey, and the children wearied themselves with new excite-

ments, and only the sorrowful heart of the widow remained unchanged. Now and then some little incident would engage her attention, and bring tears to her relief, and again she would relapse into thought, and pursue the pensive dream which occupied her.

A little bird flew one day from bush to bush, as they passed a brake of fern and tangled brushwood. It flew so far, that the lady could not help remarking its activity, and the sweet notes which poured from its tiny throat, as it persevered in its rapid flight. "Sweet songster," she said to herself, "how blithe thou art! Is the world all cheerfulness for thee, and dost thou know no storms, no winter's frost? Is thy nest on high, and safe from the prowler's hand, and do thy nestlings rock to and fro in the summer breeze untended and unharmed? Art thou bound on some errand of love for them, and will thy pinions never tire, ere thy task is done? A sad heart is beside thee, little wanderer, sing not so gaily! A sad heart is beside thee, trust not too fondly! The tree of the forest is marked to be cut down. Thy dwelling may be laid low, even with the ground, thy loved ones cast forth and desolate, and thou, poor bird, wilt then pipe a death-wail, instead of carolling thy hymn of joy!" But the winged traveller speeded on his way, as though he could heed no warning voice, and the lady thought again,

"Happy creature, thou canst not fear! And I, too, was once as thou art! But now," she might have said,

———"I do not ask to see
The distant scene,—one step enough for me."

Day by day she became less sensible of the con-

solation her simple faith had at first afforded, and the natural objects, which at the outset of her journey had attracted her notice, faded from before her sight. Only the thought of rest, as she approached the bourne where friendly hearts waited to greet her escape from a hostile country, came across her like a glimpse from heaven. The path wound upwards over a projecting cliff, at the angle of which was to be beheld the long desired goal, not the wayside inn, but a hospitable home; and wearied and depressed though she was, she cared not for the hill "Difficulty," in prospect of the palace "Beautiful," whither, like "Christian," she hasted to find a refuge from the pains and perils of her pilgrimage. The height attained, river, plain, and forest, were seen far behind, glowing in the light of the setting sun; and close in front stood the mansion of the seigneur of the village hamlet, embosomed in the mountains. They directed their steps towards it, and soon its gates were thrown open to receive them, and the little troop was welcomed within its walls.



CHAPTER III.

TRAVEL MADE EASY.

"Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak,
Whispers the o'erfraught heart, and bids it break."

MACBETH.



HERE are a few valleys in the southwest extremity of France where the people hold the Protestant faith. And hither the widow Anna, in fulfilment of a promise to her husband—that, in case of disaster to himself, she would seek the protection of his intimate friend the Count St. Eustace—had directed her steps. His house and castle, situated in one of the many lovely defiles of the mountains of the Pyrenees, was, as yet, unassailed by the rude hand of war, and offered a fit asylum for one who had so long suffered by the touch of its calamities. Shut in from the outer world, the inhabitants of the village of La Roche heard not the fatal sounds, except from report and afar off; and, as yet, no unwelcome intruder had outraged the laws of hospitality which the poorest willingly proffered, in natural simplicity and kindness of heart. Here, therefore, if anywhere, the sorrowing child of fortune could rest, as in some blissful home which has survived the wreck of all things beside.

Anna was by birth a Swiss—a native of those lovely scenes where the mind reposes and gathers strength for the coming evil. Nursed in strict retirement and in habits of hardy integrity, she was a fit wife for the noble-minded Victor, and proved herself worthy of him by acts of heroic self-denial and by calm courageous conduct, such as the soldier's wife must command, if she would follow her husband's footsteps in his arduous campaigns. Attendant upon him, though often at a considerable distance from the march of the army, she was left to judge and act for herself, at an age when the mind ordinarily turns to lean upon some other maturer and more steadfast than itself. But the warmth of her affection knew no difficulties when put in comparison with the happiness of him whose loss she justly said had made her acquainted with sorrow, as for the first time. Bound to him by fellowship in a thousand dangers, was it to be wondered at, if her heart, thus dealt with, was for a while overwhelmed? But there is a power of reparation in the human mind as in the body. The house that is founded upon a rock will not, in God's mercy, utterly fall. And His Providence, always most evident in our utmost need, was here remarkably shown, in the guidance of the poor widow to the house where best she could receive the consolation that was due to her. Do we doubt the care of souls in the Divine economy? Is not the life of each individual Christian an answer to the question?

There was a small room in the castle, facing the east, and sufficiently elevated to catch the sun's earliest rays, as it rose upon the mountains, and poured its

golden flood in brightest streams across the vale beneath. The casement of the room opened above a terrace-walk, where orange and citron vied with each other in exhaling their rich perfumes, and the balmy air stole softly in. Both its fair occupants were dressed in black. The one for custom's sake, and because society demands this outward sign of the heart's woe ; the other, because she, too, mourned, and this sable colouring was fittest to testify her resignation of life's holiest joys. Anna reclined in an arm-chair, while Agatha, the sister of the Count St. Eustace, employed herself in making garments of a rough and homely texture, suitable for the poor. They were silent.

How expressive is silence ! thought Agatha. What a tale it tells ! The mountain-lake lies still and motionless, yet it has its deep springs continually welling up, making the surface rise higher and higher, until the wind stirs it into motion. And the heart has its deep emotions, which cannot be spoken of till time and circumstance bring them forth to light. But the closed lips reveal its silent pleadings, the meek abiding spirit that waits for the troubling of the waters to give it healing ; or that sees no hidden well to provide it drink in the desert.

And silence is sacred, Agatha continued to meditate ; I would not interrupt it. There is comfort and wisdom in the lonely thought. How often have I wandered forth to breathe my grief to the quiet woods, and passing clouds, and peaceful heavens, and to God above ! And a holy calm has stilled my impatient longings, my bitter memories. I have

learned to be thankful, and to find a joy even in grief. Yes! silence is most grateful to the burdened spirit! It is liberty and peace. Even here, while we sit together, our thoughts commune apart, we bless our solitude.

Agatha looked up and saw the tears stealing down her companion's cheeks, but they were wiped hastily away. "It is sinful to repine," she said, "when all around me is so bright; yet the contrast to my sad heart is painful."

"And I have sometimes felt the same," returned Agatha. "When the spring-time has come, I have wished it were autumn or even winter again. For the cheerful thoughts which the sunshine and fresh budding plants inspired, gave rise to yearnings after happiness I was never, I believed, destined to know; and I have sunk back into deeper gloom than before, only for this reason, that my lot *looked* harder in the brilliant prospect of summer than the more sombre hue of other days."

"But mine has present reality to give it effect," said Anna; "like the rough foreground in the painter's landscape."

"And to some is given a prophetic eye to scan the future as truly as if it were really present," replied her friend. "The shrinking heart sees the shadow of the cloud, and prepares itself for the coming storm. And this was my case."

"Would you tell me of your sorrows, Agatha, they would lighten mine. I seem to myself the one most afflicted of all God's creatures."

"The fault is natural," she answered. "Any in-

ordinate grief, abiding within us, becomes too mighty and too big for its narrow dwelling, and, unless we control it with a strong arm, it will at last break our weak earthen vessel. But forgive me, I do not mean to reproach you. Perhaps my words may seem to show I have been familiar with sadder scenes than those in which you now behold me, just as the leaves and scattered branches prove the violence of the storm that has swept through the forest."

"There was a time," continued Agatha, "when I had a selfish love, a dream of this world. How long it lasted, whence it came, and whither it went, I scarcely know; for it seems to me, now, as if it had never really been, save that the remembrance still lingers, and that I am not what I was. And thus sorrow passes away, as joy passes, but it leaves us not the same." She paused, and then added, "I have watched the lark rising on joyous wings, as if to reach the very fount of life itself, and I have thought 'such were my aspirations after happiness.' And I have seen it drop down into its lowly nest, and have said, 'Thus did my hopes fall to the earth, but into dust and perished.' Yet did I say perished? Then has come a light in the far distant horizon, as sometimes when the sun declines, and we know not whether it doth presage a brighter morrow, or one more fraught with clouds than sunshine. I learned meanwhile to fill the blank of a solitary life with something better than self."

"Is it selfish then to mourn?"

"Surely there is always more or less of self in overmuch regret or care."

"But if it be for another dearer than ourselves we grieve?"

"Love too often blinds us to our own infirmities."

"Alas! is human love of no avail in Heaven's sight?" replied Anna.

"Oh! say not so," replied Agatha warmly. "Love is a precious casket, which can only be injured by the perverseness of those who refuse to entrust it where alone it can be in safe keeping. Heaven gave it, and to Heaven we must restore our treasure. So shall it yield us an increase of blessing, far beyond all we had ever hoped or anticipated."

"But if the object of our affections be for ever removed, can this be so? Can the blessing outlive the life of man?"

"Yes, if our love be worthy, it will have an existence longer than the fleeting moments which first gave it birth, and for a while fostered its growth. The remembrance will never fade, nor the warm spring of true affection grow cold and fail. On the contrary, like yon little stream, it will give us to dispense to others what we have received pure and abundant from the fountain-head."

"You have, indeed, been exercised in the school of affliction, dear Agatha, and can well teach me."

"And is there no better help at hand, no friendly voice, saying, 'Wilt thou be made whole?'—a god-like faith to feel the cross, yet meekly to take it up and bear it?"

"Could I bid farewell, as you have done, to the pleasant things of earth, my task would be more easy. But even now the sunny spots of happier hours come

back to me with the voice and look of love I shall never know again." And Anna's eyes filled with tears.

Agatha was touched, there was silence once more. The word farewell, she reflected, is but little understood on this side the grave,—it takes a lifetime to comprehend its meaning. For often, as we speak the word, the meaning still flees from us, and the severing of our dearest affections remains yet to be accomplished. Could we say it, once and for ever, to all departed joys, could we have no will but God's will, would not Heaven descend to dwell with men?—How lovely the landscape appears! The fulness of joy seems imprinted upon the face of nature; why cannot we, too, rejoice, and be filled with unbounded felicity? It is God holding the balance between our natural and spiritual life, with so firm a hand, that neither excess of happiness, nor, if we be true to ourselves, too much of grief, shall overwhelm our finite capacities. The "weight of glory" needs an angelic nature to sustain it, just as much as the burden of sorrow Divine support. Have I not been too hard upon my poor sister in adversity, since God has compassion upon us, even in our joy? Yet there is an affliction deeper than her own!

Agatha at length spoke, addressing herself with tenderness to her weeping friend.

"There once dwelt in these vales a poor woman, who was the object of my deepest sympathy. She was a gentle creature, too gentle, if I may so speak, for her wayward lot; for she had not that buoyancy of spirit which can lift us up above misfortune. When first I knew her she was very young, and happy in the affections of her husband and love of her firstborn. As I passed

her cottage I heard her sweet lullaby, or saw her waiting to welcome her husband, on his return from labour, with a smile which lighted up her quiet countenance with peculiar beauty. As time went on, two more little ones were grafted on the parent stock, and were cherished with equal affection by their mother. But a change passed over her, at first incomprehensible to me. I observed the active energy, which happiness once imparted to her delicate frame, exchanged for listlessness, the cheerful voice become low and saddened in its tones, the ready reply wanting; and I ventured one day to inquire the reason of her evident distraction, for no perceptible difference in outward circumstances explained the cause of it. I hoped I might minister to her necessities, if she had need, or speak some word of comfort, if, perhaps, her trouble were that of an uneasy conscience. But no answer was returned except tears; and I perceived, at once, that He who is mighty to bring peace could alone soothe her silent sorrow. An interval occurred, during which I seldom visited my poor friend, for I could only form vague and fearful surmises of the truth, and it had become painful to us both to meet. At length, however, to my surprise, I received, one morning, an urgent message, entreating me to come to her. It was early dawn. The dew lay fresh upon the grass, and the cattle had scarce risen from their lair. There was little stir abroad in the village, and I trod rapidly along. I reached the cottage door, I breathed a prayer for those within, and I lifted the latch. Oh, what a scene was there! the mother lay pale and exhausted on the bed; the children, frightened and bewildered, were

clinging round her ; a neighbour, who had reached the house just before me, having been my messenger, stood looking helplessly on, and everything wore the aspect of neglect, as if grief were very present indeed. I sat down, and was left alone with these forlorn and bereaved ones, for bereaved they were, in the most afflicting sense. I gained, from the lips of the unhappy woman, a few broken sentences, which explained all, and I felt despair, for a moment, sink into my own breast, as into hers. Her husband was gone she knew not whither. A day and two long anxious nights had passed, and she could hear no tidings of him ; and she was too well aware of his altered affections to doubt the fact of his certain departure, it might be, for ever. Where was then the love of their youth, their plighted troth, the joy of their domestic hearth ? Their children, were they left but as living proofs to the world of their father's guilty desertion, to their mother, as ever-present memorials of her dishonoured state ? Must she now rear in sorrow, and by dint of hard labour, those who were once the delight and the pride of her maternal bosom ? Yes, it must be so ! As I walked home, I thought on these things with an aching heart. Shall the innocent then suffer for the sins of the guilty ? As of old, must the victim be sacrificed, to show the deadly nature of sin, and the beauty of holiness in them that suffer, like the lamb slain, according to the will of God ?

“ I looked up, and saw that since I first came forth the sun had risen high in the heavens. Its rays cheered and warmed me. It had a voice for me, telling of its great Author, of Him whose ways are higher than

our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. Else wherefore was He 'bruised for our iniquities?' And I said aloud, 'He that goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him.' 'He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.'"

"Does your poor friend yet live?" inquired Anna.

"She has, I trust, entered into that 'rest which remaineth for the people of God.' Though often dejected, she kept her eye heavenward, and in faith and patience pursued her journey thither. Her children are my kind brother's peculiar care."

"I can murmur no more. God's will be done!"



CHAPTER IV.

A WAYFARER AND HIS STAFF.

"Oft in life's stillest shade reclining,
In Desolation unrepining,
Without a hope on earth to find
A mirror in an answering mind,
Meek souls there are, who little dream
Their daily strife an Angel's theme,
Or that the rod they take so calm
Shall prove in Heaven a martyr's palm."

CHRISTIAN YEAR.



HO could help loving the gentle Agatha?
She who, with chastened gladness in her
heart, and a blessing on her lips, sought to
comfort all who mourned. You saw her,
greeting the morning freshness with her smiles, light-
ening the noontide labour with cheerful words, and clos-
ing the curtain of repose, to such as needed comfort,
with soothing hopes of a brighter morrow. She seemed
like a pleasant dream, dispelling the disturbed fancies
of the sleeper, or as sweet music to the longing ear;
for the several parts of her character formed together
one harmonious whole, and the tenor of her life was
unbroken, as if sorrow had never ruffled its surface.
Yet, indeed, was it marked out by Heaven as one of
peculiar self-renunciation. Her youth had been cast
in stormy times; and when the fancy is most rife, and

the heart puts forth its powers, as the tree its fruits, she had sacrificed her affections to the will of her parent, and suffered her lover to depart, without vow or token that could bind him in trust and confidence to herself. Obedience had been the ruling principle of her actions—a simple, faithful, dutiful obedience. In the strength of that willing obedience, too, she continually cast aside her grief, and the peace of God came stealing o'er her heart, like the south wind on the garden of spices, making it to yield the odour of a sweet sacrifice, well pleasing to God. From hence the task of ministering to others became her chief delight, and the sympathy she bestowed was returned fourfold into her own bosom. No peasant, but hailed her presence in his humble cot! no child, but threw itself in her path, to obtain the sweet smile of recognition! And this, while God alone was witness of her patient efforts against secret repinings. But who shall estimate the reward of those who thus renew their strength at duty's fountain! "They shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."

This wondrous and beautiful simplicity, in the character of Agatha, partook, in some degree, that of the simple people amongst whom her lot was cast. Patriarchal in their manners, the authority of the parent was handed down, from father to son, in the light of a divine law which cannot be broken, and the disobedient child, or one given up to vicious courses, had no claim to regard like those who never deviated from the paths of virtue. The child, too, cherished the parent, in case of poverty or distress, and disregard to the paternal rule was rarely heard of. The

small patrimony which each family possessed was regarded with a kind of religious faith, and preserved as a precious heirloom from generation to generation, along with the virtues by which, chiefly, its narrow limits had been industriously maintained. And though the days of feudalism were long past, the same principle extended itself to the lord or *seigneur* of the district, who dwelt amongst them as the father of his people, and whom they considered themselves bound to honour by every tie of love, duty, and respect. If any one could have laid claim to this homage, by ancient heritage or long ancestral descent, the Count St. Eustace would have had good right to do so. For ever since the beginning of the fourteenth century, when the foundations of the castle were first laid, to the period when feudal power was altogether abolished, the counts of La Roche had exercised an independent sway over the valley and its dependencies, and though always the objects of envy to many a bold baron, no successful rival had ever dared to dispute their sovereignty. The ruined yet massive watch-tower, on the neighbouring summit, proved the jealousy with which its lords formerly guarded their native stronghold. And now that more peaceful and civilized times had succeeded to the cruel animosities of those days of yore, their descendants still occupied the same abode, but content, in its calm decay, to read the moral of their own fall, and to look upon the bygone glory and grandeur of their house, as with reverence for departed greatness which can never return.

Situated at the extreme verge of the verdant woods, which clothe the slopes or undulating surface of the

mountains at their feet, and which, with the hoary pines hanging upon the steeps above, constitute its chief source of wealth, the castle of La Roche is backed by a rock, of such size as to give a significance to its name, and so lofty and precipitous, that it completely defends it, as with a wall, on that side, and excludes the view of all things beyond, even to the tops of the high hills which enclose the valley, and the mightier range, with its snow-clad and rocky peaks, which bounds the distance with its majestic presence. In front, the village lies hid, as if in the most sequestered nook it can find, surrounded by trees of the most exquisite variety of foliage, scattered, park-like, in the fields extending from the castle to the vale beneath, and forming a fringe of verdure to the little hamlet, which, by its contiguity to the rugged background of the picture, looks like a nest in some hollow oak, scooped out by age, yet still capable of affording shelter to the wanderer who has essayed to find there a timely and secure refuge. It occupies but a small portion of the wide basin stretched out before it, and here are fields waving with corn, and rich pastures decked with wild flowers of every description; while, skirting the plain, where the mountains again rise inferior in height, but beautiful in their varied shapes, and rich, like their opposite neighbours, in pine forests and many a deep ravine, the river, slowly and with almost a sleepy current, winds its way, till, roused from its inactivity, on reaching the outlet of the valley, it leaps and foams over its rocky bed, at the bottom of dark and deep precipices, and, released from the bondage in which it has been held,

rushes onward to water some scene of lesser beauty in the vales below. At this point the mountains almost meet and join hand to hand. A ponderous portal of rock stands sentinel at the entrance, and a bridge of nature's workmanship, of the same material, crosses the stream at a great elevation from the opposite bank. It was here that the widow Anna and her weary train, having surmounted the pass which ascends at an angle to this approach on the western side, had beheld the retreat where her toils were to find a respite; and as they drew near the village, and climbed upwards to the castle gate, the loveliness of this mountain upland continually disclosed itself, until the view terminated, at the further end, by the path making an elbow directly through a narrow defile, of some miles in length, conducting to the gorge and village of St. Jacques, its connecting link with the living world beyond.

But how attempt to describe a scene wrought in so many and divers colours, and such varying outlines, as this? How copy the complexion of the ever-changeful atmosphere? Now sombre, and casting its leaden shade over every feature, now lifting the veil, and showing what light can do to make nature wear a face of joy, saying, to each one in the great human family, "Rejoice!" Or how tell the thousand intimate associations which combine to render each dell and fountain, rich as they are in traditionary lore, so dear to the worshippers at these rural fanes, that few are ever wont to stray far beyond the boundaries which a happy fate and their own inclination assign to them? Yet were there some wayworn travellers in this vil-

lage of the mountains, besides the one we have already noticed, and those so lately welcomed there. And some there were, too, who acknowledged no difficulties on life's journey, or, perhaps, cared for none, for their hearts were engrossed by pleasure or by sin—some all-absorbing passion, which excluded every thought beside.

Such was the peasant Duclos. A man whose whole soul seemed set upon petty gains. He had been lame from his birth. And because that nature, as if with foreknowledge of his sordid propensities, had crippled his personal activity, and placed a drag upon those energies which make money the reward of labour, he strove to revenge himself on her subtle intent; and wrung from the toil of others, with severe exaction, the earnings which he was forbidden to win by his own exertions. Yet this, at least, may be urged as an excuse on his behalf, that education had not furnished him with more enlightened motives, (it is certain that religion had not,) nor the fostering care of a mother softened those dark traits which appear too often in characters of more marked determination than ordinary. He had felt the ills of poverty and neglect, and these had hardened his heart when the genial influence of parental affection might have softened it.

His son Antoine was, like himself, a motherless child. But, unlike him, he had not those fixed purposes which distinguish the strong-minded from the weak and yielding, nor yet those earnest impulses which often stand in the place of more sterling qualities. He was dependent rather on the will of others than

his own, and this dependence had been encouraged by the stern nurture and unbending will of his ignorant father. For it is with the faculties of the human soul within as it is with nature without. The tree needs the free air to expand its branches, until years adding to its growth it becomes the monarch of the forest. And the generous mind needs but permission to exercise its best gifts, for the regeneration of itself and its own race. But with Antoine his planting had been in an unkind atmosphere, and the feeble efforts of which alone he was capable had been stunted in their first outshoot.

Poor Antoine! a harsh greeting awaits you as you travel down the mountain side. You are late, and your tired mule, as if with prescient thought, does not stop to gather the scanty herbage, but pricks her ears and stumbles on the uneven descent, as she hastens home. The cottage gate stands open, and the lame man hobbles to and fro, muttering impatient words, and threats of undefined revenge. "Idle fellow! Does he think time is of no value? Is it not worth gold?—A curse on my lameness!—But I will show him what the maimed can do. If he will not work neither shall he eat. Ho, Antoine! Come at last, art thou! Hark ye! Put Rosetta in the stable, and bring me the pack. No more loitering! Dost hear?" Antoine did not reply, but prepared to do his father's bidding; and having attended to the wants of his dumb friend, not without many remonstrances on the part of Duclos, as to the waste of time he occasioned by his compassionate care for his faithful companion, he brought the pack, and undid

it without speaking a word. This silence was, indeed, the effect of his passive nature, and no proof of sullenness on his part, but rather a safeguard against the angry words which too often assailed him.

"Where are the cakes and the comfits, boy?" said Duclos, surveying the various articles which the open bundle displayed. Then, hastily seizing upon one parcel more neatly prepared than the rest, he added, "Take them to the castle, they are for the count's table. When will Mademoiselle Mathilde ever say again, 'Duclos, I can depend on you, you never disappoint me?' Ah! it is too late! But go! Yet stay! These muslins are for Lisette! Return by the Bocage. The wedding will provide many an errand there. I would not miss one, no, not for any worth. If Lisette should learn to say, 'I can do without this or that,' where is Albert Duclos' trade? And have ye a tongue in your head?" he continued, raising his voice, as Antoine stood mute and despondingly by; "if ye have, say, there are finer muslins than these, and will Mademoiselle please to have the best for her *robe de nocces*?"

Thus tutored, Antoine departed. He did not murmur, but he felt dull and heavy. The slight burden he carried seemed too great a one, and the road he travelled, longer and more wearisome at every step. He reached the castle, and, depositing the small package in the hands of the porter, he ascended the hillside by a winding path which led directly to the wooded district, known by the name above mentioned, and so called because, being the highest point at which shrubs and dwarf trees could abide the rough

gales, as they swept at intervals from off the ocean through the mountain valleys, they grew here with greater luxuriance than usual at such a lofty height, owing to the shelter which a large pine forest afforded to a situation screened by nature from the violence of an uncertain, though not ungenial climate.

Lisette's father was the count's steward, only second in importance to the count himself. And Lisette herself was no mean personage. She was the belle of the neighbourhood, and as good tempered as she was beautiful. Antoine toiled with increased efforts as he approached her dwelling. Perhaps he longed to look upon that kind and beaming countenance, for possibly it reminded him of some dream of bygone times, when an angel form gladdened the home that was now so cheerless. Perhaps, though he did not allow the thought, there came before him, dim and indistinct as it was, another home that he hoped one day to call his own—a hearth where gentle voices should speak, and smiles gleam across the scanty board ; a sacred haunt, where poverty and affection should dwell hand in hand. However it might be, Antoine paused not until he turned an angle of the hill, which shut in this wooded recess from the world without. And here, as if too soon, in the presence of that joy he had pictured to himself, he was struck with bashfulness at the sight of Lisette walking alone, and within a short distance of the place where he stood. She beckoned to him to advance, and he, scarce knowing what he did, obeyed the summons. With humble recognition, and cap in hand, he stood before the youthful beauty.

"You have come a long way, Antoine; did you bring these things from St. Jacques to-day? Why travel so far to-night, when Le Jeune would have brought them to me himself to-morrow? He is coming to the valley, as I told you, at early morn."

"It is no matter, lady;" answered Antoine, and he faltered forth the message with which he had been entrusted by his father.

"Oh! thank you," replied Lisette. "But I see you are weary." And she eyed him with a keen glance, as if to say, 'It is of no use denying it.' "Come with me, and you shall rest while I examine this precious parcel, which is indeed light for the value of its contents."

Antoine mechanically followed the maiden, and they were soon at the low but ornamental building which was the abode of the hard proud man and his lovely daughter. It is scarcely possible to imagine a place better calculated to nourish high thoughts, unless they were directed heavenward, than this lofty retreat. And though the eagle in his eyrie might, with greater reason, believe himself lord of earth, air, and ocean, the noble bird could not assume that power with a more conscious superiority than did the steward and overseer of the Chateau de la Roche and its dependencies. He dwelt alone, amongst the hills, and no one came near the solitary house, except on business, who was not an invited guest; for the temper of the fancied dictator was well known, and to intrude upon his privacy was but to seek the lion in his lair. Yet could he be meek and gentle to those whom it was his interest to serve; and some generous

acts might be told even of him who brooked no interference nor resistance to his orders ; for the exercise of powerful liberality is sweet to those who are born to command, and temper does not always mar the action, even in the most ill-natured. But these occasions were rare, as may be supposed, and, it is true, Grandchamps loved rather to say to his servant, "Do this," and to be instantly obeyed. From the platform in front of his house there was no land visible that was not included in the count's possession, and, like Pharaoh of old, he gave all things into Joseph's hand. It was amidst a strange mixture of what in life is most beautiful and severe that Lisette had grown to woman's estate. Both her parents had been cast in a sterner mould than nature ordinarily adopts, their rigid tempers only softened by the love they mutually bore to their child. And, except for this reason, Lisette might perhaps have inherited an intractability of disposition which would have completely spoiled her gay exterior ; but which, if it did appear, only displayed itself in courage and lightheartedness, and a disregard to the petty inconveniences we are all heirs to. At the same time, a gentler heart had been her friend and counsellor, her playmate in childhood, and, as years advanced, the sharer of her youthful hopes and affections,—those fancies which play around the entrance of a world too real for their enjoyment far beyond the threshold. He was the adopted son of Grandchamps, and therefore, in his eyes, the fittest partner for Lisette.

"Where are you going in such haste, child?" said her mother, as she tripped beneath the trellised ve-

randah, covered with roses and jessamine of her own planting.

"Oh! mother, Antoine has brought me my white robe from St. Jacques." And her eyes sparkled as she spoke. "Come, see! Is it meet for your daughter, for Grandchamp's child? His father bid him never rest till he gave it into my keeping. A pretty piece it seems! And yet he says, 'Is it fine enough for the bride, the heiress of the Bocage?'" And Lisette smiled, as she spoke, at her own presumption.

"A worthy man is Duclos," replied the stately dame; "he knows what is fitting his superiors. We will see if he doubts with reason as to the quality." And they disappeared within the house.

Meanwhile poor Antoine was continuing his happy dream over a plentiful supply of cider and cold viands, which the kindness of Lisette had provided him. Her words of sympathy lingered in his ears, and he forgot for a while the harsh tones which were wont to grate upon them. Nay, though her coming would be to dismiss him from her presence, he awaited anxiously the opening of the door at which he expected her to enter the apartment; and when the sound of her far-off step reached him, he rose, and his deep eye revealed the gladness which his lip was unaccustomed to express, either by word or smiling gesture.

"You may go now, Antoine, and I thank you," said Lisette, with her habitual courtesy, as she came into the room. "I will show you a shorter way home, and you must listen attentively while I entrust you with another commission. But, indeed, you have

done well for me, and I need not fear you will do your best again."

Thus encouraged, Antoine proceeded with a brisker step than when he first met his kind benefactress. They left the house by a door on the opposite side to that at which they had entered it, and walking through a gay parterre, and down a smooth slope, they came to a shrubbery, or small green-wood, which graced the hill-side, and still descended to where a gate opened upon a path leading through the mountain gorge immediately to the village.

"Farewell, Antoine," said Lisette. "Farewell," looked Antoine, as with grateful heart he bowed low in acknowledgment of the favour she had shown him, and turning homewards, pursued his way with thankfulness that he had at least some fruit of his labour to lay at the feet of his hard-hearted parent.



CHAPTER V.

ROSES, BUT NOT WITHOUT THORNS.

—“Time will bring on summer,
When briars shall have leaves as well as thorns,
And be as sweet as sharp!”

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.



HAVE sought you everywhere,” said a swarthy youth to the fair Lisette, as he met her returning through the wood.

“As you look for a lost thing in every place but the right,” she answered gaily.

“I could not guess you were a bird wandering from your nest at this hour,” he replied; and with a half reproachful look, added, “My Lisette is not apt to play truant, and I will not suspect her of it now.”

“You are right, Gaston,” she said, a maidenly pride kindling her soft countenance; “but since you seem to doubt me, I shall not tell you my errand hither.”

Le Jeune, for it was he, took her hand, and seating himself on the projecting roots of an antiquated thorn, gently drew her to his side.

“How long is it to St. John’s Eve?” he said, while a smile lightened his handsome sun-burnt features.

"Oh, a long while, Gaston!" retorted the maiden with a woman's coquetry; "you need not begin to count the days yet."

"I have counted years of patience, why may I not reckon days and weeks of joy?" But Lisette was relapsing into thought, and he continued, "My boat is in the haven now, and I will not put out to sea again while you are spared to me."

She looked up with wondering eyes into her lover's face. She was thinking how short the years had been to her.

"Have your years, then, been such slow and sad ones, you who have made me happy? Have I known you so many years without knowing this?"

He regarded her with a look of affection.

"Listen to me," he replied. "You have known me, it is true, almost as long as you can remember anything. But how long have you known my heart? Is it not a very short time since I was permitted to tell you its deepest secret? And the heart is like a roll of paper, which, until it is unfolded, we see not what is written on each leaf therein. We may open it here and there, and catch a glimpse of the meaning, but unless we begin at the first page, the remainder is but darkly understood. Yet we are ever reading the hearts of men backward, every way but the right."

"I have thought the reading of your heart plain enough, Gaston; but though you have given me the clue to unravel its contents, I do not understand you."

"It is time you should learn, then, my Lisette;

for truth may appear out of season like an unwelcome guest, or the sere leaf amidst the summer foliage. Let there be no dead leaves in our home garland. Let it be all glad flowers. Know, then, my proud heart, and if you can, forgive me."

Lisette looked incredulous.

"It was on this very day, just fifteen years ago, that I came, an orphan, as I have often told you, to dwell amongst these hills. How many sorrowful thoughts it recalls to me, of the day when I left my first home, my parent's grave, and the scenes where my infancy had been passed, the cottage garden, and the cypress in the churchyard. Your father was stern in his kindness, and contrasted strangely with those fond guardians whose loss I mourned, and whose memory was so fresh within me. But I understand now what was then a mystery to me. I comprehend the moody passionate expressions he was apt to indulge in, the silence broken by words of rebuke and counsel, too sage for my childish ears; and I can see the meaning of those frequent bursts of anger, nay, almost of dislike, which chilled the boy's heart in me, when at length it was beginning to feel something like affection for the builder of my humble fortunes; for I know that the spirit of Grandchamps stooped low when he took his sister's son from the mean estate to which she had descended by her improvident marriage, and lifted him to be equal with himself, as his own son."

"My father is proud, but he loves us, Gaston."

"Yet his love is as the lion's for the offspring that are worthy of their sire, and it cares little for the

sick and helpless, and those who turn out of the way to die. Do you remember the day on which you were sixteen, Lisette?"

"'Tis not so long ago, that I should have forgotten it."

"No, but days wear a different complexion for us."

"The day I was sixteen," said Lisette thoughtfully. "You had a holiday, as you always have on my birthday. What more, Gaston?"

"Ay, what more?" he repeated ironically. "Do you not recollect you told me I was no Gaston for you on that day?"

"Perhaps I do. You were very silent."

"And you spoke truly,—so truly, that I thought you must have known what, in the fulness of my heart, and trembling like yon quivering aspen leaf, I had asked on that morning and been refused, as the hound is spurned from his master's feet, to do his bidding."

"I did not know it, Gaston."

"No, you knew it not. For the pangs the heart suffers are such as the eye cannot see, nor the tongue reveal, but like the unsightly fungus that saps the tree, and destroys it inch by inch, root and branch, they drink the life-blood, and the body fades as a withered bough, and perishes."

"But you are not withered," said Lisette, looking up, and laughing at the manly healthful countenance beside her.

"And if not, it is because I have lived in your smiles," returned Gaston, a little rallying from his

passing excitement ; " but I will forget the past, let us talk of the future."

" Of our snug little farm in the vale, where we shall bid adieu to proud thoughts. I'll doff this broad hat, and wear my gay kerchief, like the meanest dame of the village, and spin and knit and grow fat upon the mere pleasure of being Madame Gaston Le Jeune, who can do whatever she likes best."

" Not so fast, my Lisette. Remember your father's eye is everywhere, and we have nought we can call our own."

" But we will have sheep and goats of our own rearing, and crops of our own sowing, and our own free thoughts which no one can say nay to."

" And we will dream of patience, too, for that has given me Lisette," added her lover, somewhat saddened by his late confession, and too much out of humour with himself to pursue the interesting theme further.

He took her hand, and, gently raising her from the low seat she occupied, led her towards the house. They passed onward, a loving pair ; and the evening sky, studded with stars, shed its pure light on their dim forms as they moved from out the darker recesses of the wood into the open pathway.

CHAPTER VI.

DISCIPLINE, OR WHAT FALLS OUT BY THE WAY.

—"He, I ween, was of the north countrie;—

* * * * *

Patient of toil; serene amidst alarms;

Inflexible in faith; invincible in arms."

BEATTIE'S *Minstrel*.



HE watch-tower on the hill was a favourite resort of Pierre; and here, if Davy wished to find his young master, he generally sought for him. It overlooked the valley and the surrounding country to a great extent, and near its precincts were the remains of a Roman encampment, which, as well as the ruined tower, formed the subject of Pierre's frequent musings. He had now been some weeks at the Chateau of La Roche, and was becoming habituated to the change in his mode of life. The past seemed the long past to him, and the circumstances which had led to his removal here, as things of a long time ago. For there is a vivacity in the fancy of a child which paints the passing scene with such wonderful reality on the mind's eye, and a freshness about the events of our early days, and a fascination in this new world, which so rivet the attention as to make the time appear long which is occupied in the survey. And when, at

length, the scene recedes, the impression is not lost, it is still traced upon the memory, and only needs the touch of some fairy wand to kindle it again into light and life. And thus it was with Pierre, and this wand his peculiar property.

"I used to like that old monk at the convent, Davy," he said to his servant one day, as they reclined together on the sloping turf outside the ruin. "What was his name? Fernando, I think. He was a queer kind of creature to look at, with his bare face and the little skull cap just at the top of his head, like an oyster-shell, and himself the oyster inside of it; but I liked him for all that."

"What did he say to you, Master Pierre? You had long conversations sometimes."

"He would talk to me about himself, and tell me how he wished to be a soldier once as I do. But it fell to his lot, he said, to be a soldier of the cross instead. So he was sent to school to be made a monk."

"I should like to know how such a thing is manufactured," replied the servant. "How it is cut, and squared, and smoothed down, undressed and then dressed up again, to be the very ghost of the living man, that once it was."

"A very uncomfortable sort of education, I should think, Davy, if it be true as you say. But Fernando was very happy at school. Every one tried to make him so, and at last he became good."

"That seems reversing the order of things to my mind. But go on, Sir."

"Why, Davy, you see Fernando had been to school before, and had not been happy there, nor good either.

But the kind fathers of the convent where he was tried to make him love them, and to love learning, and to love God, and they were together, like one large family, all helping one another."

"I suppose it was with him as it is with us when we like one commander, such as your father was, better than another; and just as when we love our great Leader we keep his commandments."

"Yes, and one grave old monk was very kind to him. He was grave, but he could tell stories like Fernando; and he would take him into his cell, and talk to him of what he did when he was a boy. It was a tiny little room with scarcely any furniture, except a bed, and a table with pen and ink and paper upon it, and a high-backed chair which had a knotted cord hung over it, to remind him of his duty, he said, and a low seat, that he might kneel on it and say his prayers. And sometimes he would leave Fernando there alone, to think over all he had ever done or said or thought of in the course of his life, and to write down what he could remember of it. But oftener he got him to tell stories in return for his."

"Why, you would have liked the story-telling."

"Yes, that I should, for I am always living in the long, long ago, as you say. And I should have liked the beautiful services in the chapel, and the music, and the flowers they hung about it on festivals, and to hear the bell ring for prayers, as it did in the Convent of Las Tres Sorellas. That bell made me dream, Davy! How glad the poor monks must have been to come out of their hiding-places and worship God once more!"

“ But you must not be always dreaming.”

“ Yet everything seems a dream to me, it is so soon come and gone. I am like Fernando ; for he would get up in the middle of the night, when his companions were asleep in the dormitory, and climb up to the window which was close to his bed, to look out upon the fields and the woods, and the blue hills, and the bright moon that was shining upon his home, as it did upon him ; and then he would creep back into bed and dream of all that he had left behind him, till his eyes were full of tears. Just as mine are sometimes, Davy.”

The servant patted his little master affectionately on the back, for his own eyes filled with tears at the moment.

“ But he learned to forget all this,” continued Pierre ; “ and one day, one evening it was, when all his schoolfellows were playing in the courtyard, he stole away from them unperceived, and went into the chapel. It was almost dark, and there was no light except the little lamp before the altar, burning there, as it did in the days of Eli, in the temple of the Lord, and he was all alone. Can’t you fancy how dim and cold the pillars must have looked standing in a row ? And then so silent, there was not a sound. He forgot himself as he stood there. He forgot everything he had ever wished for, his father and mother, his little sister, too, and he thought only how much he should like to be a missionary in some distant country, and tell the people what he had learnt, and teach them to be good, as a soldier of the cross ought to be. And he said, he felt so happy

leaning against the cold marble pillar, that he did not know how long he stayed there, and he could never forget that time, if he lived a thousand years."

"I am thinking, you will be still more like him, some day."

"But I have no teachers, as Fernando had!"

"I don't see that. For look you, master Pierre, our own lives teach us,—everything that happens to us teaches us; each person, too, may teach us something, though he be neither so good, nor so great as your father. But that plant yonder can be our teacher, just as well as any man. I have often thought what a tale these beautiful things could tell, if we sat by them and questioned them for ourselves. That is a rhododendron! How handsome it looks amongst its fellows, growing wild on these hills, and all uncared for, though its blossoms are so gay! But let us take a lily of the valley; it is of quicker growth; one could almost see it put forth its shoots. Besides, we are told: 'Behold the lilies of the field, how they grow.' I never saw so many different kinds as there are here. Now suppose you or I were to sit by one of them day after day. It would first be only a green bud rising clean and bright from amongst the dark mould; then the bud would expand, and by and by leaves would appear round it, to shelter and lift it to the free air. And then, if it had a tongue, it could tell how the storm blew upon it and the cold wind checked its growth, lest it should become a tall and sickly plant, and the warm wind drew it forth again, and bade it not sink back and die. And all this time it thinks not of its

stature, for can it add aught to it? It thinks not of itself, I say, but buffets with the gale, and lifts its head to the gentle rain, till God calls it to beauty in the gay sunshine, so that 'even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.'"

"What a pretty story you have made of it, Davy! Fernando could not talk so. He had been accustomed to speak to Chinese and strange wild men, wilder than those wild Catalans whom we paid to bring us here. He was nearly murdered by them for telling them of Jesus, and so he was ordered to leave China and come to the convent of Las Sorellas. He used to take me up to his hermitage in the rocks, where he went every day to pray for them. It was covered with moss, and there was a little altar inside and a crucifix on it."

"There is no need of that to remind us of the cross in this world, for the cross is in our hearts, as well as by the wayside."

"No, but it was a pretty chapel, and so high, you could see the sea, and the plains, and villages, and towns, very far off; and Fernando said, if an enemy came to destroy the convent, he should fly there to hide himself, till God called him to go somewhere else."

"How came he to take so much interest in you, master Pierre?"

"I don't know, Davy, but when I stood by him sometimes, as he dug and weeded in the garden, he would stop and put his hands together, and look at me as if he were praying for me. I asked him one day what he did it for? 'That God may bring

you home to his flock,' he said. And after that he asked me if I should not like to be taught to serve Jesus, and that if I did, I must learn obedience to his cross, as he had done."

"Well, no doubt, he was a good man. But don't you take it into your head that you can't serve God without being a monk. There has been trouble enough in your family by that notion."

"When did that happen, Davy?"

"In the days of auld lang syne, and Prelacy, and Presbytery, and the ain country, we may never see again, when a man would cut off his right arm, and pluck out his right eye, for conscience sake. And so it was that one of your clan, in an evil day, made a vow he would shave his head and take to the cloister. He had plighted his troth to as sweet a maiden as ever wore the snood; but the bit of enthusiasm must have its way, and so they parted; and she never held up her head afterwards, but pined, and pined, till, 'tis said, her spirit grew so restless it cou'd na stay longer: but it comes back to vex the old grey towers, as if it had a spite against them, for having kept it prisoner so long; and 'tis the only tenant they will ever know, for their gates stand wide open, and whosoever will may tread down the green grass that grows within the walls."

"Did you ever see these old towers?"

"Yes, for I was not bred and born here, as your dear father was. I left the Highlands when I was about your age, and I've a'most forgot the tongue I learned to lisp at my mother's breast; but it just comes back to me when I talk o' the bonnie land, like the

sweet smell o' the mountain heather, and then I'm a child again, wandering over the hills and far away."

There was a pause for a few moments, but they were only moments, for the mind travels quickly, is here and there, and come again, and far off once more, so that when Davy spoke he had lighted quite in a new place.

"I am thinking of the home that may one day be yours, if these wars should cease, and each one should have his own again. It is something like this country, and yet different, just as the mountains of Scotland may be like any other mountains, but they have the look and feature of the fatherland, ye find nae other where. And so the valleys of Ardennes have rivers traversing them in all directions, as the one we hear yonder, and there are table-lands, and forests of oak and birch; but no grand mountains, no glorious pine-trees, climbing almost to the sky, none of the soft breezes of this southern coast, that make flowers spring forth everywhere, we know not how, as if angel hands tended them, so nigh their own gate. They are mostly deep and narrow valleys, with meadows by the water-courses; and in one of these was your father's home, as it may be here, but not so proud; and his parents were rich in flocks and herds, like other folk, before the time of the Revolution."

"What does that mean?" asked Pierre.

"Well, 'tis just a term people use to express a great change in the state of things. There was the Revolution in England, when the English would not have King Jamie to reign over them, and when

your father's family came over here, and left all to follow him ; and there was the Revolution in France, not many years ago, when the French would not have any king at all, and cut off his head, you know. But there is a coming round of nations, as well as of men, and things, and seasons. The bad brings forth the good in this world oftentimes, or else good men, like your father, would not forsake the righteous cause, as he did, though it was hopeless, and join the side that is not theirs in heart, only because they think they see the little sign of good coming out of the great evil. But I am talking of him when he was a man. He was but a youth when I was sent for from over the water."

"When you came to live with your grandmother, Davy?"

"Yes, as she had come before me to serve i' the laird's family. She was bred of the old stock, and had a drop of the good blood in her veins. But the cottage by the fish-pool was nae home for me. My heart was awa' by the burn-side, where my mother dwelt ; and I loved the strange tales my grandmother could tell (I wonder if these glens have as many belonging to them) of Mac Phersons, and Mac Donalds, and bonnie Prince Charlie. You have heard of bonnie Prince Charlie?"

"O yes, Davy, and I love him, too."

"Well then, you can understand how those who loved him still better than you do, loved those who were kind to him and those who came after for their sake. And so it was that your father's father lost all in the service of poor King Louis, as his

father's father had given up all before to serve his own king that should have been, and his ancestors again for their king."

"Their riches, at last, must have been like the single piece of silver at the bottom of your large leathern purse, Davy, which you said had plenty of room to spend itself in, and to make merry at its own expense."

"Ay! and like an old garment, too, which the oftener it is patched, breaks out afresh in new holes. Your grandfather married a French lady, and, settling upon her property, became a tiller of the ground in his old age."

"And what has become of him and my grandmother?"

"When their lands were confiscated, and trouble poured in upon them like a flood, they just bent their heads to the storm, as the poor flower we were talking of; and for a while God sheltered them from it, and then took them beyond its reach. But your dear father was to do battle with it once more; and as he had been planted in this country, he would not leave it, but thought how he could best serve the land of his birth, and, if it might be, regain the inheritance in it which was his by right."

"He should have given it up as his father did, and been a true patriot."

"And he has given it up for ever, my dear young master."

"Ah, dear papa! I did not mean to find fault with him."

"No, you do not understand that these accidents

are intended by Providence as sign-posts to guide us on our way. For we are but blind men groping in the dark, and when God hedges up the path on one side, we must seek for it in another direction. No doubt your father often thought on his home for your mother's sake. It was his dream that he would take her there, one day, when his toil was over. And meanwhile he suffered for his country, he hoped time would amend all, and he was swayed to and fro by events, as a man is carried hither and thither in a crowd, and drawn into the thickest of the fight, whether we will or no; and it does for him what the monk's hood and cowl did for Fernando, it makes another man of him."

"And we have had no home all this time, and papa had no home to die in," said Pierre mournfully. "I think I see him now in that large room, the refectory they called it, wainscotted with oak, so black and cold, and the high windows, so high that they caught the last gleams of the setting sun above the rocks, as the spires and pinnacles of the convent did, and his poor bed in one dark corner. I shall never forget that room, any more than Fernando will forget the chapel and the cold marble pillar. It took me out of myself to see him die. I wished I could lie down beside him and die too."

"Come, come, sir, you must not talk so. We cannot spare you yet. How did your papa learn to die, do you think?"

"Tell me, Davy."

"We must go back and look at the lily of the valley once more, when it lifts its head to the gentle

rain, and the blessing of Heaven comes down upon it, making it 'spring forth and bud.' For just so are the promises of God rained down upon us in His word. Your father, who was always studying his Bible, and carried it about with him even on the battle-field, learned in this way what that victory is which overcometh the world."

"It is 'our faith,'" replied the child instantly, catching, perhaps, in this allusion to his parent's dying words, the first faint idea of the infinite meaning which those two short monosyllables convey, 'our faith.'

They rose to depart, for they had finished the thread of their discourse, and had come to the end of all things in this world—death and eternity.



CHAPTER VII.

SIGNS AND TOKENS.

"Woe doth the heavier sit
When it perceives it is but faintly borne."

RICHARD II.



WISH I were thou, Rosetta," said Antoine, the morning after his interview with Lisette, as he stopped to rest for a moment on his way to the little town of St. Jacques, "I wish I were thou, indeed."

The patient creature turned her ear towards the speaker, and her eye betokened that she knew well the accents of kindness which the voice betrayed in the midst of its deep tone of sorrow.

"Yet thou dost look as if thou should'st understand my grief."

And Antoine passed his arm over the animal's neck, and tears came dropping fast, while he bent his head, and gently leaned upon her shoulder.

"I am tired," he said, addressing his mute companion once more, "and thou knowest it, but dost thou know I am sad? Thou hear'st not the word of reproach—yet if thou didst hear it, would'st thou not be sad as I? Then could I give it thee, that thou

mightest feel as I do. But no. It would grieve thee too much."

And Antoine clasped his arm the tighter round Rosetta's neck.

"On, on!" he said at length, recollecting himself and starting up. And Rosetta moved onward in good earnest, as if wondering at the long delay. The road they travelled was wild and bleak, exposed alike to the summer's sun and the winter's blast, and it suited well in character with the lot of Antoine and his patient mule. The path hung upon the mountain-side, over which its giant top seemed to frown darkly, and save the sound of the rushing waters far beneath, and the low brushwood which draped the precipitous sides of the narrow defile, there was nothing either to attract the eye or amuse the senses by the way. No village hamlet or smiling pasture appeared to enliven the dreariness of the prospect; and except that both knew the tokens in the sky when a storm drew near, and the ground beneath their feet, as the alphabet the child learns in infancy, never to be effaced from his memory, no friendly sign served to vary the monotony, or mark the distance of the winding pathway. It was as a portion of their common existence, for they trod it daily.

Yet this path, dreary as it was and strange, as connecting scenes of so much fertility and beauty, possessed an unusual interest for Antoine on the day of which I speak. The words of encouragement Lisette had spoken to him abode within his heart, and her kindness, contrasting as it did with his father's reception the day previous, though it had just now

given rise to his unwonted emotion, incited him to a more lively exertion on her behalf. When his longings for sympathy, even from his brute beast, had subsided into their accustomed calmness, he proceeded with a lighter step, and strove to prove himself her willing servant, by executing her commands as speedily as possible. The future also had a brighter promise for him; but probably Antoine did not think of this; for weariness and unrequited toil dispel such dreams, and contract our life-horizon within narrow limits. It is true, however, that the approaching nuptials were likely to furnish him, to the satisfaction of Duclos, with many additional errands, and a greater stir than ordinary prevailed in the village. Its inhabitants had few other topics of conversation at the present moment, and the proposed establishment of Lisette and her husband at no great distance, while it enlarged their common sphere, at the same time extended the boundary which contained the fish for poor Antoine's net, whenever circumstances fortunately conspired to bring them within it. Thus the neighbours, following the custom of this world, occupied themselves more with the concerns of their superiors than with their own.

"A young pair they'll be," said one good housewife to another, as they stood at their cottage doors watching the sun's decline, till it sunk with rapid fall behind the mountain-top; "but the young birds make the best mates, they fear not the winter's frost."

"Lisette has no need to fear," replied the other and more envious dame, "for Grandchamps will feather her nest well."

"Ay, but love and fear not is my maxim. It makes the nest warm any day. There's no lack when the hand is stout and the heart fresh, Marguerite."

"You can say so, but it is not every one that can," she replied.

"True. Spring birds sing in the autumn, and I am as happy now as I was in the days of my youth."

"You are fortunate, Jeanne, and so is Lisette. A fair bride she'll be."

"And she'll have a brave bridegroom," answered Jeanne, travelling back in imagination to the day when she and her old man, now worn and weather-beaten, stood beside the altar, a fine specimen of the nobler work of God, and happy in the conscious possession of that love which faints not nor is weary on life's pilgrimage.

"I have heard say he has had a difficult time of it," said Marguerite. "Grandchamps is a hard task-master."

"The prize was worth waiting for," replied Jeanne. "Lisette is a jewel we don't find every day. And she will not soon wear out in his eyes, for he is of the right stuff, I trow."

"Things will go smoothly enough with them, no doubt. But, saving yourself, Jeanne, I have not much faith in long years of peace, unless plenty go along with them."

"Peace and plenty!" said Jeanne thoughtfully. "They may walk hand in hand. There is plenty, it is true, at the Bocage. Yet mark me,"—and she raised her hand as with a prophetic gesture,—“if poor times come, Le Jeune is ready to meet them. I have

noted him often. His step is as free as the tread of his steed over hill and dale, and his eye is as bright and firm as the diamond the Lady Agatha wears, which they say she will never put off till she becomes the bride of heaven."

"Is it a love token the Lady Agatha wears?"

"No, not that exactly. But it might well be so, for it is a perfect gem, and so is the fair lady who wears it. I was at the castle, as you know, Marguerite, to see my daughter Elise. The Lady Agatha came into the room where we were sitting, and she seemed to me like the ring she wore, all lustre, glancing in the sunlight, her sweet smile brightening the place for a moment ere she was gone."

"But the ring, Jeanne, what means the ring?"

"It has more meanings than one, I believe, Marguerite. You shall hear as far as I know what is its history. When we were alone again, I said to my child, 'Elise, that's a beauteous ring the Lady Agatha wears.' 'Yes,' she replied, 'it belonged to the old countess, and Mademoiselle Mathilde told me it was sent her years back by the count's brother. He is a great man in the East, you know; but he was wild once, and used to be wanting to do things different from other people, like François, mother.' 'Ay, child,' I said," and Jeanne heaved a deep sigh, as if something oppressed her, "'but go on, tell me about the ring.' 'Well, mother, the countess set a great value on it, as you may suppose, and would call it her most precious jewel, because it was, in some manner, the reward of her son's service; and she wore it on her fore-finger even on her deathbed. But one day,

not long before she died, she sent for the Lady Agatha and the young count into her chamber, and they remained alone with her an hour or more. There was not a sound heard, except now and then the feeble voice of the dying countess; but when they came forth again there were tears on the faces of the count and his sister, and the ring was on the hand of Lady Agatha."

"She must wear it for her mother's sake," remarked Marguerite.

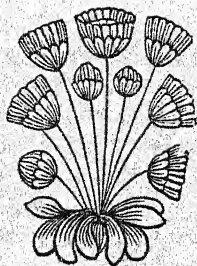
"For the love of her and of those far away, all in one, perhaps," added Jeanne. "It is thought the countess repented at last of her hard conduct to her daughter, and begged her forgiveness, even as her son might have asked hers, by the same token. And more than this, that if ever De Montmorency shall return, the Lady Agatha will be his. But years have passed away, and this may never be." And Jeanne heaved another sigh. "'Tis a pity to silence the early note of the song-bird, or turn it into a death-wail."

"You know more about these things than I do, Jeanne. How came it he left her?"

"He was poor, Marguerite; the younger son of a noble family, and the Lady Agatha is rich. The old countess scorned the match. But Grandchamps is wiser, and builds up his house with his daughter's wealth, and with her love, which is far better."

"We shall have a gay wedding at any rate, Jeanne. But here comes Antoine. Rosetta is heavily laden to-night, and Duclos will be satisfied for once at least. Good even, child," she said, as Antoine, with that measured pace, which will not allow of one step

lighter than the rest passed by. "You will not miss of a good word this night. But when will you have anything in your pack for me? Never, child, would be nearest the truth," continued Marguerite, putting the question and giving the answer, in the same desponding and unthrifty tone. "Yet I'll have a new kerchief when the pride of La Roche gets ready for her bridal." At this allusion to Lisette a smile of recognition brightened Antoine's countenance, but, without waiting to continue the conversation, he only hesitated for a moment, and then went his way.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE VOW REGISTERED.

"Those happiest smiles
That play'd on her ripe lip, seem'd not to know
What guests were in her eyes; which parted thence
As pearls from diamonds dropt."

KING LEAR.



UCLOS was, indeed, well content, and for many days and weeks the horn of plenty overflowed for him. But all this time the cheeks of Antoine were growing paler and paler. The wedding-day at length arrived, ushered in by the brightest sun that ever shone on a summer's morning. Every one was up early, and the village seemed astir with expectation. Women, their heads tastefully adorned with handkerchiefs of a light woollen material, striped in gaudy hues of green and orange, crimson and blue, some with a petticoat to correspond, and with dark boddices, sauntered about, the spindle laid aside, or gathered in knots of two and three to hazard a conjecture upon the events of the coming day. And children, in similar costume, wondered, with curiosity and delight, at something, they scarce knew what. So unusual was the excitement in which fathers as well as mothers, young and

old, seemed to share alike. Even the lame man for this day allowed himself to forego his thoughts of gain, and watched to see the procession pass the gate where he had so often waited with other and less complacent feelings. It came, at length, in the same direction by which Antoine had reached his home on the evening of his interview with Lisette. See! with what an undulating motion of gay garments floating in the wind, and spirits attuned to a more lively measure than ordinary, young men and maidens tread the edge of the mountain-valley, along the winding path, which descends to the church and the surrounding cottages in the plain below, across which the sea-breeze comes stealing from afar, as if it never displayed a more angry mood. And hark! children's voices are singing carols. And now the youthful forms of Lisette and Gaston are revealed to the anxious gaze of many beholders. They come first, walking a little apart from the rest, Lisette, with pensive eyes cast downwards, as if she feared the earth would melt away beneath her feet, and all was a dream to her waking thoughts, her muslin robes flowing around her, and her face shaded by the capulet or square scarlet mantle; Le Jeune, firm and erect, rejoicing in the accomplishment and realization of dreams now past. And next come six girls in apparel of the lighter sort, the colour of the rose blending with the lily in their waving scarfs and streaming ribbons; and in their train as many youths, chosen to do honour to the nuptials of the heiress and her betrothed. And behind are Grandchamps and his wife, and many a bidden guest, and such, too, as are per-

mitted the privilege of sharing the distant regard of the master and mistress of the Bocage. Alas! pride mingles strangely, even at this moment, with the gentler passions which the occasion inspires. Yet love is there. And as the little company enters the church a serenity, in token of its presence, settles down upon the countenances of the betrothed ones, which does not forsake them until their vows are ratified, and they rise crowned with the benediction upon married pairs, and prepared thus to take their first step together, as "bound in the bundle of life," for weal or for woe. Then Lisette, her mantle thrown back and the lilies encircling her head appearing beneath, as she leaves the sacred precincts, smiles a joyful smile, and the children hasten to scatter wild roses, the white and purple anemone, and many a favourite flower, upon her path, especially those which, on this eventful day, are supposed to possess a kindly influence against the powers of evil. The church, a simple solid structure with a tall spire, that the bell may fling its sound abroad amidst the lofty uplands, is crowded, though not with devout worshippers; for the fame of Lisette's beauty has brought many together, and some who before only knew it as the theme of other tongues; and they press around her as she comes forth, so that not even the count, who has been present to give away the bride, can reckon himself of any importance on this day, so superior is the power of love and loveliness over the curious multitude. At last, their homage ended, she passes onward, and, leaning upon the arm of her husband, they return, in advance of the attendant guests, up the gentle ascent.

"We are happy," were the few words spoken and responded to in those first moments. "But look there," Lisette added ere they had proceeded many steps further. "See that old man pacing up and down. 'Tis Antoine's father. My mind misgives me. For surely the boy was to have come to the Bocage this morning. I had prepared a little present for him, yet he came not."

Lisette was right. While all else was glad around her, the heart of poor Antoine was still as death, for he lay in a swoon beside his faithful mule, having fallen down from exhaustion while in the act of tending her. It was just before they walked past the cottage that Duclos had discovered the fact, and his hurried gait betrayed to Lisette that something was amiss. This was his usual manner of giving vent to his disturbed feelings; for, like most unquiet spirits, his body, at such times, was ill at ease; and, by defying his lameness, he signified his determination not to be hindered, even by his natural infirmity, in that which was as the life of his very soul—his sordid grovelling desire to add gain to gain. But on this occasion a more fearful emotion agitated his frame. He had sought to raise the boy, he had called upon him with an affection which had lain dormant for so long a time that it had become as if it had never existed. He had almost shrieked aloud with terror at the bare supposition that Antoine was dead, and the hope of his gain for ever extinguished. And in this moment of agony, and uncertain what to do, he swayed himself backwards and forwards, as a lame man mechanically does, to assist the action of his

body, but with an unnatural vehemence, impelled by the current of his absorbing passion.

"Oh, Antoine, Antoine! what will become of thy poor father?" he said aloud, while continuing his walk. There was a tone of self-commiseration in the words spoken, and yet of affection, as when one feels the value of the thing that is lost. They awoke an answer in the breast of another who was passing by, but of whose presence he was quite unconscious.

"He shall die like other men, Albert Duclos, and shall have no want in the grave, except of one to mourn beside it."

"You speak truth, woman," said Duclos, starting and turning round.

"And if I do, 'tis no more than I have thought this many a day. But what has happened?"

"Come in, come in," he said, unfastening the gate, and leading her in, and across the walk to the stable door.

She stooped down, and took the hand of the boy in hers. "He is not dead, he will awake, Duclos; there is warmth still. See, the blood has not quite forsaken these purple veins. But why is this?" she added, perceiving the countenance of the man relax from its fixed perturbed look to something like a smile of satisfaction. "Is it not that the burden he bears is too heavy a one for his tender years?"

"He does not complain," he replied, and his face resumed the same hard look it was accustomed to wear.

"Yet he should not be over-tasked, as he has been of late. The bough that is easily bent does not snap asunder so readily, but it will give way at last."

"Ah!" ejaculated Duclos, with an ominous sound, as if his first idea returned to haunt him.

"His heart is weary, like his body which is fallen down here," continued Jeanne, for it was she. "The light heart will sing of joy and grief in the same moment; but when did I ever hear Antoine whistle a roundelay? and you say he never complains. Thou dost not know what labour is, Albert Duclos, for thou hast not earned thy bread in the sweat of thy brow. Thy wife laboured for thee, and now thy son."

"Peace, woman!" he replied, with a sternness which made even Jeanne tremble, and she spoke softly.

"She is at rest, and let her memory sleep, if it pains thee; but surely you should have a care for her child."

"I did not bring thee in here to say this to me."

"Nor did I come to say it, Duclos, but the mother's heart speaks in me."

She rose up as if to depart, but Duclos still detained her.

"Help me to lift the boy and lay him on his mother's bed," he said; "perhaps it will awaken him."

The room into which they entered was a low white-washed apartment, with hardly any furniture but a bed that looked cold and comfortless. The only thing that caught the eye was a rose-tree which hung around the little window, overshadowing its small lattice-panes. It had apparently grown and flourished there for many a year, and it spread its soft branches, as if in tender sympathy over the

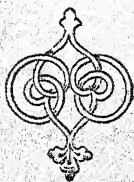
desolate abode. A rose-bud, the last on the bush, touched the glass, and was blown now here, now there, by the breeze just stirring through the valley. It was a half-opened flower, and scarce promised ever to become full-blown.

"How like that unresisting boy," thought Jeanne, as she sat by the bedside watching for returning animation. And then there recurred to her mind the pale and patient creature, whom she had sometimes seen, but not often, the mother of the sickly child, and she pictured her to herself toiling to fulfil implicitly the will of her husband—the same unrelenting will, which, as it had borne down her gentle soul and sent her to an early grave, was now preparing the way thither for her child. And she said to herself, "Another spirit than that of love has dwelt here. Another plant grows beside that sweet rose-bush." She looked, as if suiting the action to the sentiment, and saw a poisonous creeper entwining itself about the stem of the tree. It had risen almost to the top, and had blighted the blossoms, which hung brown and withered on their discoloured stalks, all save the one she had before noticed, which, as it bowed its head to the wind, seemed to answer sorrowfully to her mute appeal to bloom there a little longer, to bear the blast awhile, if it should come, though it were, indeed, alone, and a gloomy fate around it.

Antoine awoke, at length, from his long stupor. He looked surprised to see Jeanne, and his eye wandered round the room, as if trying to discover where he was. Then a tear stole into it, and a momentary recollection, as of the long past, appeared to flit across

him. But it was soon gone, and he subsided into that dim and confused state of mind which usually succeeds its temporary overthrow.

Jeanne went out to call his father, for he had retired to the porch, and was awaiting the result in moody silence. She hoped it would exercise a happy influence over him, and perhaps it did so. She departed and left them together.



CHAPTER IX.


COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE.

"To be pained for a minute, to fear for an hour, to hope for a week,—how long and weary !
But to remember fourscore years, is to look back upon a day.

* * * * *

——in sweet treachery, dealeth the aged with himself,
He gazeth on the green hill-tops, while the marshes beneath are hidden."

PROVERBIAL PHILOSOPHY.

 AM glad I have seen the bride," said the widow Anna to Agatha St. Eustace, as, escaping the crowd, they returned, in meditative mood, through the almost deserted village. "We were screened from observation, yet I could mark her countenance as she came and went."

"You do not regret having come."

"Oh no, for I, too, had once a birthday to my future, such as she has."

Agatha sighed. For she felt that if ever she were destined to partake the overflowings of life's springs of joy, it must be as when the traveller quaffs the draught in haste, knowing there is but little time left for him to pursue his journey ere the day is done.

Yet she could sympathize with one whose cup had been snatched, half-finished, from her lip, and when most she felt the need of its invigorating contents, for her own had been dashed from her untasted.

"An old woman dwells here," she said, "whose life approaches so very near its end that we can hardly say there is any future for her upon earth. And her past is so long that she can remember nothing, except its beginning and such striking events as, like yon towers, will need a century or two more to pass over them before they crumble and decay. Shall we stop at her cottage on our way home?"

Anna acquiesced in the proposal, and they entered a hovel built of stone from the mountain quarry, and roofed with slate, whose walls had sheltered its inmate in youth, mid-age, and decrepitude, and were soon to witness their time-honoured guest silently pass without, to the gate of the Eternal City.

They sat by her bedside and did not speak, until she awoke from her short slumber and faintly recognized them.

"How are you, Lucille?" inquired Agatha in her most compassionate tone.

"I have lived long enough, lady," she replied in a feeble voice. "The day is far spent for me; and though your kindness would wish me to stay here a little longer, I am quite ready to go."

"But you are willing to remain surely, are you not?"

"I hope so, otherwise I am not ready to depart. But there comes a time when life is no longer dear to us, because its burden is so great. I thought,

years ago, when I lost my kind husband, I did not care to live; but I was mistaken, for I could love my children then and be happy in their love, but now I am so full of age, I can think of none beside myself, except my dear grand-child—Lucille we call her, she is named after me.”

Here the mind of the aged woman seemed to wander, and it was necessary to recall her to the lost thread of her discourse.

“How long is it since your husband died?”

She answered slowly: “Thirty, forty—nigh forty years.”

“Does it seem so long ago?”

“It looks like a speck in the distance, that grows bigger while I have an eye upon it.”

“You have had many blessings since.”

“I could not see them at first. They came out one by one, like stars in the evening sky, I used to think.”

“Yet you sorrowed not as one without hope.”

“I hope I have a’ most done with sorrow,” she replied, catching at the words, without exactly perceiving their intent. “But some things will be coming back,—some things time never wears out. A lone woman is a sad sight to me who have sorrowed alone,” she added, noticing Anna for the first time; “God bless you, dear lady!”

“You are happy now,” Anna gently remarked, as she dwelt upon the idea of sorrow coming to an end even in this world.

“I am hastening home,” was the answer, “and I have long been looking forward.”

“Let us go,” Agatha said at length. “Lucille seems inclined to sleep.”

The two friends walked homewards. They reached the terrace, and sat down to enjoy the beauty of the morning.

Anna was lost in thought for a few moments. She broke the silence by saying: "I am thinking of the day when I was a bride, a day as bright as this is. My home was a village in the mountains, as this may be; and we lived retired from the world, as you do here. I knew no trouble, save that the vintage failed some years, and I heard complaints of it. The poor suffered from it, but we did not. Or there was a mortality amongst the cattle. But what did it matter to us? And there was war afar off, but it did not reach our gate. I met our old pastor one day. He had lived in our village time out of mind. He knew all his flock, as a shepherd does his sheep, their wants, their very wishes too. He seemed to guess at them if we did not tell him, and I loved his grey hairs as much as I do the fair locks of my little Roland. He said to me, as if he divined my thoughts, 'You are thinking of leaving our village.' How could he know that? I did not know it myself; yet it was most true. I was dreaming of what was beyond the boundary of my home ideas.

"'You must not leave our village,' he said. 'There is peace here, and there is peace beyond it, so 'tis said,—(for the short peace that hovered over this earth for so brief a space, it can hardly be said to have set foot upon it, had just been declared.)—but I do not believe it. I have lived long enough to note the signs of the coming tempest, and I would not have you leave our

village.' I looked abroad upon our smiling lake, upon the white houses perched in the green hills just above it, upon the mountains far and near, unshadowed by a cloud, and I answered him in his own words, 'Yes, there is peace here.' But I looked again, and into my own heart, and was conscious, for the first time, of something like a wave that ruffles the face of our fair lake when it portends a storm. I had thought it was nothing but the light breeze of the summer's day, and I launched my boat upon it, but my fate was decided. When I stood by Victor's side, on that yet brighter day I spoke of, some few weeks later, my sage Mentor said to me once more, 'You are leaving us, as I said you would. You did not believe me when I told you so; but you will think now that I am a true prophet.' I said, 'I will trust you better for the future.' 'Trust in God, my child,' he answered. 'Take an old man's blessing. And when you find the world too bleak for you, come back to us. I will pray for you.'

"Did you put faith in his foreboding words?"

"I was too happy. My bonds were, as Lucille says, like things time never wears out. And soon I found them binding me closer year by year, link within link, and time adding to these, until the last link was broken."

There was a pause, during which neither of them spoke, and they sat gazing on the scene before them.

"I should like to see the mountains of my own country once more," Anna said at length; "these remind me of them."

"Are your mountains more beautiful than ours?"

"They are like a few very remarkable men amongst many ordinary ones. Do you understand me?"

"Yes; you mean that ours are less distinguished in form and feature. But we have our great men too. Have you seen our snowy peaks which lie hid behind the barrier of rock that invests our castle?"

"Pierre has promised to show them me, when I can climb to his favourite seat by the watch-tower."

"He will help to light the bonfire there to-night, I doubt not," said Agatha. "Our hills will be all in a blaze, for it is St. John's Eve."

The weather, indeed, promised gloriously for the evening's entertainment. Yet a practised ear might have detected, in the occasional sighing of the breeze, light as it was, an unfavourable omen.

The grounds below the Chateau of La Roche presented a gay scene on the afternoon of Lisette's wedding-day. The count, to do honour to his servant, and to dispense his hospitality the more abundantly, admitted many guests within his domain; and amongst these all his poorer neighbours, who, in their holiday costume, might be seen dancing and otherwise disporting themselves in the fields and beneath the trees, now in the first glory of their summer dress. The feast ended at the Bocage, the bridal train descended to the castle, and even the bride herself did not disdain to mingle in the revels, and to bestow such smiles and kind words as won her many hearts, and the golden wish that nothing evil might ever mar the happiness which had that day lighted upon her. Abundance of good cheer, in kind suited to the

taste of these simple villagers, was not wanting, and the count and his friends moved to and fro with that easy courtesy which bespeaks the good will of all because it is so little proud and so unassuming in the eyes of others. How unlike his master was the servant, and yet his lord knew it not!

"Grandchamps, I wish you joy," said the count. "Your daughter has a husband worthy of her."

"He is of our own blood, my lord."

"And of your own training, too, he will follow in your steps."

"As the foal the dam that has reared him. He has ever been to me as a son, and will do me no discredit, I trust. All your poor servant hath is his in promised possession."

"Your daughter! Do you not count her amongst your riches? Has not the better part fallen to him already?"

"Pardon me, my lord. I cannot reckon her worth. But I would not willingly have given her to a stranger."

"You are right, Grandchamps, she is above all price. And now about the cottage for Jeanne Bellecour and her husband?"

A cloud passed over the countenance of the steward, for Jeanne was no favourite of his, nor her husband either—they were of too independent a nature to please him—but it was quickly dispelled.

"The cottage is well enough, but it is too small, they say. Then why do they not send their son to work, and out of his parents' way?"

The count was staggered.

"Surely the roof is in need of some repair," he suggested.

"No, my lord. There's many a roof needs repair when the minds of men would be soaring up through the chinks in it. But let Jeanne teach her son his proper place in the world, and the house will be large enough."

"I do not understand you ; I will make inquiry as to the matter," replied the count ; and, with a respectful obeisance, the steward turned aside, as he passed on.

The day was wearing fast away, and the evening drew on. Every tree and flower seemed to know its time of rest, and the birds were singing their parting notes, as the people, retiring from their sport at the decline of day, came forward up to the castle gate, and into the paved court beneath the terrace, to testify, with loud acclamations, their gratitude to their kind benefactor. And the hollow wind made moan, in answer to the sounds as they died away. It presaged a stormy night.

"Where are you going, François?" said Pierre to a boy of rustic appearance and older than himself, as he was about to mingle with the crowd.

"I am going home," he replied.

"Nay, do not go. Did you not tell me there were to be fireworks at the Bocage to-night?"

"Ay, but they are to be seen far enough off, all the country round, they say, for no one is to go near the place. The steward has strictly forbidden it."

"May not I go there, think you?"

"You may, but I may not forsooth."

"And why not, François?"

"It is said, 'Thou shalt not come nigh thy neighbour's house.' I know no other reason."

"What a strange man Grandchamps must be. Does he think that people will honour him the more for it?"

"Why, as to that, he has honour enough already. 'Tis your honour this, and your honour that, and, if you will, I'll do what your honour pleases."

"Well, then, we will let his honour alone," said Pierre. "But see, they are lighting the bonfire at the watch-tower, though it is scarce dark."

"It will be dark by the time we get there," replied François. And off they ran.

On arriving at the spot, the two boys wearied themselves, as boys will do, with plenty of unnecessary labour, assisting those who would fain have had the task entirely their own, in adding fuel to flame and flame to fuel; till Pierre, fairly tired out at last, petitioned his companion, in good earnest, to sit down and rest. They chose a sheltered place, where, out of the reach of the volume of smoke which ascended from the half-ignited pile, they could watch the flame gradually enveloping the mass of wood, till it rose high in the air, a beacon answering to many and many another on the ruddy-capped hills.

"I cannot think what you tell me is true of Grandchamps," said Pierre, his thoughts still running on that stray piece of humanity, unlike the pattern of ordinary mortals.

"It is as true as I sit here. He is shut up with his own greatness yonder."

"But what good can it do him?" inquired Pierre, with unsophisticated simplicity.

"None at all, except that, perhaps, it will make him humble some day, for he may lose it all. He would have us live, like bats and owls, in holes and corners, while he lives in the light of the broad day. He would have us cringe and bow down before him, while he walks upright. 'Tis, 'Your hat, François."

"Has he always been so proud?"

"He has grown proud by little and little maybe. He likes not my father nor my mother, because they have nothing to say 'thank your honour' for, and he likes not me, because I am neither a dog to bark at his heels, nor a trumpet to sound his titles before him. But he would care still less for me if I did his pleasure," added François, with true far-sighted policy.

There was a pause; for Pierre, gazing at the fire, seemed lost in his own contemplations.

"Do you ever dream of camps and sieges, François?" he said at length.

"I dream of nothing."

"But can you not fancy soldiers sitting round their camp-fire, as it might be here, on such a night as this, and the flame driven aslant by the wind, just as at this moment?"

"I suppose I can."

"And can you think how they would talk of all that had happened? How one had borne himself nobly, and they would drink a cup to his health; and another had died the death of a hero, and they would say, 'Poor fellow, he was the best I ever knew;' and their captain had outdone himself that day, and"—

"It is more than I can think of. The future for me."

"And the past for me," replied Pierre.

"It is better to think of the living than of the dead, in my opinion," said François.

"And a man is worth more when he is dead in mine," retorted Pierre.

"But if a man is good for nothing, he is best forgotten," urged François, perhaps forecasting in his own mind the fate of the tyrant.

"But I hope I may be remembered, like poor papa, because I should have been worth something."

"You will be a great general, as he was, some day."

Pierre did not reply. He was thinking how a man becomes great, according to his notion. "How the wind is rising!" he remarked, after being silent for an instant.

"Ill luck to the bride, if it does," replied the boy. "What's to scare the ghosts and the spirits of evil, if the fires are blown out to-night? His honour will turn hobgoblin in very faith and good fellowship. And look! his rockets are all tossed backwards in the air, as if a flight of his own people were coming down upon him at once."

The wind, indeed, began to blow violently, till it rose to a perfect hurricane. It swept round the ancient walls of the castle, and scattered the leaves of many a fair tree which reared its head within its friendly shelter; it whistled through the bastion towers; it kept its onward course through the village, to wind its horn amidst the heights and depths of the

surrounding hills; it shook every cottage door and lattice window, snapping the tender stalk of the rose-bud as it passed; it gave a mystic voice to the bells in the church steeple, as if angel-tongues whispered through the roar, or a hand had touched the chords of some sweet instrument, the sound of which was lost in the mightier torrent; it rushed to overwhelm, if it could, the house where love and joy were still keeping holiday.

And one asked of it: Whence comest thou, thou stormy wind? Thou that wast so lately but as gentle zephyrs beside running streams, and sheep lying down in green pastures; as the light wind fanning the corn, that looks golden in the eye of day, while every blade and every living thing is hailing thy near approach?

And it answered:

Whence I come, and whither I go, thou canst not tell, O simple one; but the trees of the forest proclaim my coming, and the hills and the valleys prepare me a way to pass over.

And another questioned it: Wherefore comest thou, rough voyager?

To ruffle thy plumage, O thou that dwellest loftily, to make thee fly hence on swift pinions, to scare thee from thy fastness, and drive thee whither thou wouldest not!

Get thee hence! begone, I say!

Not yet, not yet! When the morning cometh, when the dream is ended, when the curtain is lifted and the sleeper awakened, then will I flee away and be at rest!

CHAPTER X.

THE AWAKENED CONSCIENCE.

"When Cæsar says, Do this, it is performed."

JULIUS CÆSAR.



ASTE, haste, Lisette! our friends wait, and the wind is rising higher every moment. We shall not be able to descend the hill-side, or cross the bridge, if we linger longer; for the storm hovers on the heights, and should the rain fall, there is no hope of our reaching home to-night."

Lisette was standing in the verandah, on the more sheltered side of the house, and, aided by snatches of moonlight, and the glow still diffused over the heavens by hundreds of expiring bonfires, was hastily tying up a spray of jessamine which had outgrown her notice.

"I do not like to leave these tender things, Gaston, to the mercy of the pitiless gale, without a last care for them. They look sadly torn and ruffled already."

"You shall come again, soon, very soon, dear Lisette."

"Then I will not say farewell, for it is a hard word to utter even to a flower one loves."

They were soon gone, men, women, and horses—the attendants on the bride and bridegroom, as a guard

of honour, to escort them, according to the custom of the country, to their new abode. It was almost a perilous enterprize on the present occasion, for so fearful was the blast they encountered, in the hollows and defiles of the hills, that no one could wait for his fellow, or take account of anything save his own personal safety. The mountain-fires were nearly extinguished, except here and there a flickering flame dying out like a candle in its socket, and leaving the landscape in greater darkness than before. And the river rolling beneath them seemed to indicate, by its increased turbulence, that it was already frightened from its ordinary current, and was preparing to take its part in the approaching struggle. On such a night did Lisette and her husband alight upon their own threshold. No time was it for much of customary ceremony, or long leave-takings. The nuptial songs were soon over, the wedding-cake distributed, and the tokens of abundance, such as corn and other fruits, liberally strewn, and with one prolonged shout they parted, and each one turned on his way home.

It was a grand sight, from the elevated position which the steward's mansion occupied, to watch the progress of the storm, as the clouds, rising in large masses from the ocean, were driven headlong, and then scattered, by its increasing fury. Now and then the moon shone out, as the monitor of order amidst their reckless courses; but soon again her calm face became entirely eclipsed, and shed no ray of comfort over the deepening gloom.

The spirit of Grandchamps was roused by the disorder of the elements, and he went out and stood in

front of the house. The events of the day had rather tended to disturb than gratify the proud heart within him, and the thought that there was one Mordecai who refused to bow down before him was enough to stir the soul of Haman to the deepest resentment. The count, too, had seemed to take the part of the offender; "I will inquire," he had said.

"Of whom should he inquire, but of him in whose hands he has intrusted everything?" thought the steward. "'I will inquire,' he was not wont to use these words. Has Jeanne, then, such influence at the castle, through her daughter, that she can win the ear of the count himself? To-morrow's sun must see this matter set right! That wild-pated boy shall be brought to order, and Jeanne, too, shall know there is but one lawgiver in La Roche."

The wind blew with terrific force. He went in, his determination nerved to action. The tempest had no soul-subduing voice for him.

It was long past midnight, and the count lay restless on his couch of down, for unaccustomed thoughts thronged about his pillow. The circumstances of the day suggested reflections of a similar character to those which agitated the breast of his servant; but with this difference, that, amidst a general feeling of dissatisfaction, there was something also of self-reproach.

"These poor peasants!" he pondered. "How heart-felt is their gratitude, how honest is their joy! And yet, as I stood and received their acclamations, I was ignorant of the loudest voice amongst them! Their simple souls have each its tale of joy and grief,

yet I know it not, unless by hearsay. I have never touched their hearts by my own word of sympathy, and the kind word cannot be handled like the alms of the rich man in the purse of the almoner! It is eye to eye, and voice to voice, that clears the way from heart to heart! Can these people love me who have scarce heard my voice? And Grandchamps! Has he any regard for them, except as tools for his workshop? What light is that which fills the room? Some electric fluid, perhaps, afloat in the atmosphere! But no! It gets brighter, and fluctuates like the burning of a huge fire!"

At this last supposition the count darted out of bed, and approached the window. A blazing light appeared in the direction of the Bocage. His first thought was that some of the fireworks of the preceding night had fallen amongst the brushwood, and had set fire to it; but this seemed impossible, as the season was not far enough advanced to allow of the wood being sufficiently dry to ignite. And, at a second glance, he perceived that the fire, from whatever cause it proceeded, could not but be of some widely-spread and combustible material; for, notwithstanding the storm, the light in the sky was a bright continuous blaze, which increased every moment. He hastily put on his clothes, intending to run towards the village, to some spot where he could best obtain a view of that part of the country in which the work of destruction seemed going on so rapidly, and he set off at a quick pace; but though a powerful man, the violence of the wind soon obliged him to halt.

The road descending from the castle, which stood

sideways to the gale, was undefended except by a parapet of turf, and such dwarf-like trees as emulated but did not rival their more magnificent neighbours in the green fields beneath. But after sustaining the first shock it was very possible to proceed, even on such a night as this, if a matter of necessity demanded the effort, to the bottom of the descent, for the rock rising abruptly on the other side checked the current of air which forced its way from off the ocean, and sent it sweeping through the next opening in the undulating line of hills, that stood as guards to oppose its onset.

The count, as he struggled onwards, enumerated in his own mind the names with which his ear was most familiar of those whom he supposed could aid him at this critical juncture; for he perceived that the light in the heavens was evidently the sign of imminent danger and distress to those of his own people whom he was bound to succour, and he became the better convinced of this, as the hills, rounding off in the direction of the Bocage, displayed the sky more completely to his view.

"Gaspard, Etienne, Joseph! Where do these men live?" he inwardly exclaimed. "The village is all asleep."

He was relieved from his dilemma by the sound of a footstep near to him.

"Who goes there?" he shouted, his voice sinking into nothing amidst the accompanying roar.

"A friend or no friend, as the case may be!" answered another, whose commoner tones were heard shrill and sharp above the discordant jar.

A fellow as ready with blows as with words, perhaps, thought the count; some contrabandier pleased with the night's angry mood, and ready to pursue his calling at all hazards; I must accost him prudently: "A friend or no friend," he said, repeating the man's words, "do you see that light yonder?"

"Ay, and a rare bonfire it is that such a night as this cannot extinguish."

"Has it been lit in fair play, do you think?"

"The fairies do not light their torches after that fashion," answered the stranger ironically. "Their lamp hangs in the fair heaven, and it is like enough they will not trim it with fresh oil in all this tumult."

"We do but waste words," said the count impatiently; and becoming bolder as he saw, on approaching nearer, the dim outline of a youth, tall and stout, without any appropriate pack or cumbrous burden of goods, such as wool and tobacco, which the contrabandier carries across hill and valley on the darkest nights, to elude detection. "In my opinion the fire is a matter of life and death. Will you help me to find assistance for a neighbour in distress?"

"I would help him myself, with all my heart, and no thanks either," replied the lad, arriving at the conclusion, in the same moment, that the person with whom he had to do was no emissary from the mountain stronghold; "but if I am to have a slap on the face for doing my neighbour a good turn, why, grammarcy, I think I had best let the matter alone."

"But others may be of a different opinion," returned the count, recounting the names still most prominent in his memory, with an injunction to in-

form their owners, as soon as possible, of their required aid.

"Well, then, it is just a fool's errand, I promise you; for Gaspard, he never was a friend of his honour, and Etienne, it was but the other day he said he wished he might never set foot on his premises again, and Joseph, I do not think a tithe of money would tempt him there."

"Far-off water will not quench near fire," retorted the count angrily, as he turned to go away, leaving the youth in a sudden doubt as to the quality of the person with whom he had been conversing. Fortunately the alarm had spread during these few minutes, and, in spite of the assertion just made to the contrary, some were found bold enough to tread the enemy's territory with unbidden feet; and amongst those who dared to invade it was one who had given, as we have seen, the most cogent reasons against such a proceeding. And all this time the fire continued to blaze with increasing brilliancy.

"Here, this way, water, more water!" cried Grand-champs, in an agony of despair, as he saw the pride of his heart cast down, like Dagon of old, at one fell swoop, and all his hopes perish in a night.

The appeal was answered by a shout from a number of voices ringing out upon the blast, and the men pressing forward, each took his stand, and the bucket was passed rapidly from hand to hand, to be emptied upon the burning mass. But it was a hopeless task. The flames, bright and beautiful to the eye that heeded not the fearful import of their dire embrace, crept round beam and rafter, encircling every

part of the house and its belongings within a fiery ring, from the spot where first the fatal spark fell, no one could tell how, to the little mansion, with its gay treillage, its well-stacked piles of wood for the winter's fuel, and its gardens and outhouses; for the monster breath of the storm blew a whirlwind that drove the flames in all directions, like the eddies of the troubled ocean, gathering things far and near within one terrible vortex. There was indeed no fear of such a bonfire being extinguished.

"Mother, mother, the roof is falling!" exclaimed François Bellecour, as they stood at some distance from the scene of action, not daring to venture nearer, without some special call to render their assistance, until, at the cry of terror which arose at this catastrophe, they rushed forwards, and found themselves within the small court at the entrance of the house where so lately the bridal troop had assembled to take a last farewell. It was filled with a confused mass of people, all striving with vain efforts to minister help, in one way and another, to the distressed family, and to save, if possible, the small remnant of property which the greedy elements had spared from the general wreck. In the midst the wife of the dictator stood proud and stoical in her agony, refusing all entreaties to leave the spot where ruin was written in such fearful characters; and willing rather, it would seem, to perish there than face the outer world of poverty and dependence, to which, if she passed the limits of her mountain-girt home, she must now stoop.

"And who are you?" she said, as Jeanne, relying

upon her native force of character and powers of persuasion, stepped forward to renew the oft-repeated request to leave the scene.

"I am a poor woman," she replied humbly.

"And have nought to part from, and therefore can know nothing of the pride of grief, of the soul that would rather die than yield its place to another."

"Pardon me, Madam, I was born in independence, but I chose poverty."

"There, do not hinder me from warming myself by the flames on my own hearth," returned the unyielding sufferer. "Stand back!"

The command was not obeyed, for at that moment a burning brand fell at the feet of the unhappy woman, and Jeanne snatching it away, and smothering the flame it had kindled for an instant in her flying garments, uttered a last appeal, equally unheeded with the rest, that she would leave a situation fraught with so much danger, and seek a shelter while yet life and liberty permitted her to do so. But another power, and one that proved quite irresistible, was hastening to the rescue of both. For l'Homme Noir, the evil genius who in that enchanted region invokes thunderstorms, and overturns the fairest prospects of men, veiling himself on the summit of a neighbouring peak, shook from his immense wings hailstones, large enough to deface even man's image, and soon drove them from the scene. They entered a small hut at the opening of the shrubbery, and there the once proud mistress of the Bocage cast herself down, remaining sullen and silent while the storm raged. There came a lull at length; and Jeanne

took the opportunity to urge the necessity of a further departure, from fear of exposure to its violence. "My poor house has sheltered me and mine for many a year. Could it afford you a night's repose, I should be too happy."

But her generous spirit was spared the pain of a haughty refusal by the appearance of her son François, who came with overtures from the count himself, for the removal of the steward and his wife immediately to the castle; and with this salve to her wounded self-love, she was induced to rise and direct her steps towards the princely dwelling. They traversed the path by which, on the morning previous, so many lighter feet had trod gaily to the marriage; but, ere they reached its termination, a fresh hailstorm assailed their tottering steps, and, willing or unwilling, the wife of Grandchamps was compelled, at last, to stoop to enter the lowly abode of Jeanne Bellecour, and to receive from her the kind attentions she had so heartily proffered to one whose good-will she had never experienced, and whose conduct was only that of rejection and disdain.

But the noble heart harbours no bitterness. Its metal is finely tempered, and of such a quality was the mainspring which governed the actions of this poor woman.

CHAPTER XL.

THE CHAIN LOOSED.

"No sea
Swells like the bosom of a man set free ;
A wilderness is rich with liberty."

WORDSWORTH.



HERE was a cave in the mountain side, where, in days gone by, Lisette and Gaston had shared their little hoards of happiness,—those pure and simple joys which have their existence in the season of youth, which return to us, in kindred sensations, when the morning sun shines brightly upon our rising thoughts, and which only fade into dim distance when the evening of life declines. It had sheltered them in the long summer's day from the radiant heat of the unclouded heavens, and while the storm passed by ; and in winter had afforded them a warm retreat from the chill outer air, for, beside being fenced in by its native barriers of rock and the sloping earth above and on all sides, they had built with rude stones a hearth, on which to burn the blocks of wood that still lay scattered in one corner of the cave. And here were seen the low table on which their wilderness' fare was spread, and the seat, of equally unfinished workmanship, where the lovers

sat and told their tale, silently, it may have been, while yet the vow of maturer years was unknown and by them unheeded. Here, too, might now have shone upon the turf, amongst the bushes which partly concealed the entrance, the glowworm's lamp, had not the lurid heavens looked unkindly upon its faithful love for that night, and harmonized in preference with the scene within ; where weary men, the envious and the less disaffected, found a passing moment of content, in discussing their good cheer at the same time with their neighbour's misfortunes.

" Pass the bottle, Etienne," said Gaspard,—a tall athletic man, with flowing hair cut short in front, that the eye might range more freely, and lofty features, upon which were stamped the marks of energy in his calling, and keen observance, rather than those of time.

" I think his honour did not know what he was doing when he gave drink, such as this, to a set of thirsty hounds, as he deems us."

" No, nor venison meat to hungry wolves," returned the man in a more sullen mood, pushing the wine, contained in a very flat round vessel with a long neck, towards him.

" It is 'going the pace' in good earnest," replied the hunter as he set down the bottle, having poured a generous draught of its contents down his throat, at an angle of some degrees from the mouth. " A few hours ago, and we were all asleep in the valley, as unconscious of the approach of the enemy as any herd I ever lighted on in these hills; and

here we are, in pleasant pasture-ground enough, and escaped from his clutches."

"From the fire and the steel, in very deed we may say, as the carcase of this poor brute has not," said Etienne, cutting another slice from its haunch.

"Well, the flames and his honour's wrath have been the first game I never cared to meet," returned Gaspard. "The one is just like the other, a-coming round you at all points."

"And when you think to reach a sound part, and safe landing, you touch it, and it is all smouldering ashes, ready to burn and burst into a flame. Ah! I know him better than you do, Gaspard."

"That may be," he replied, "for I keep out of his way; and how I came here, by my troth, I know not."

"You came because you were free to come."

"The only reason I have to give for my goings, you think."

"The best a man can give," rejoined Etienne. He was silent a moment, as if smothering some latent fire. Then uttering the word "free," with a look and tone of inspiration, and, breathing forth his words, at first, in a low and subdued voice, he rose from his seat, and poured out his soul in language befitting the tumult within, and incoherently, as if expressing the abundance of his emotion, rather than any well-connected ideas, but embodying the feelings of his audience, who listened in rapt silence, as well as his own:—"Is not the earth free? Is not the dust free to the worm that creeps on it? Is not the air free? Is not the river free? Is not the flame free?

—I saw it curl, I saw it shoot, I saw it mount, and make itself tongues of fire, and wings to fly abroad. I saw it sink down again, I heard it hiss and crackle in the wet timbers,—I said, mount not, fly not, do thy work manfully. I heard it roar after its prey. Here, here is food for thee! Here, here is drink for thee! But the water cannot quench thy thirst. Thou art free, free! Thou canst live or die as thou wilt. Thou didst give of thine own freedom to him that needed. Thou didst say, ‘Go to, proud man, make way for the poor man to come in! I have opened the gate, I have made the path free; come in, come in!’ The poor man came, the poor man trembled. What dost thou here, poor man? Thou art not wont to give thy foot such liberty. Thy place is amongst the clods of the valley; thy place is the edge of the yawning precipice. Thy fathers trod there; thy fathers perished in the gulf. The snow-wreath betrayed their steps; the mist hung before the gate of death. Am I free?

“I’ll tread the mountain-side—I’ll shoulder my gun, and Jeannotte shall tie on my knapsack; away, away! The morning light streaks the top of the Pic d’Or; the snow is crisp; a heavy foot has left its deep print upon the surface,—I’ll follow the track; I’ll seek the monster bear in his haunts. He is fierce, he will turn again. He is strong and mighty in his anger. But courage! thy life is in thine own keeping,—thou art free. Fear not!—I’ll compass the shoulder of the mountain; I’ll scale the deep precipice; I’ll never tire of the sport. Yet see there! He is traversing the lofty steep, far, far above thee;

he is more free than thou! The thundering Gave* sounds its freedom in the rocky bottom; the melting snows flush it with life and victory; it is new-born!—I'll gain the ledge that overhangs the torrent; I'll crawl along it. There! there! the chamois lifts its head; it stands sentinel! on a point of rock its feet are gathered: it springs aloft; it turns back to look; it gains the topmost ridge; it is gone!—I'll descend; I'll clamber from crag to crag; I'll plant my long staff in the stony water-course; I'll leap over the foam; I'll double upon my prey again and again. See there! the izards bask in the sunshine; they gambol, they feed in the pastures. The sun beats down upon my head, but the summer is not here. The shepherds have not driven their flocks to the mountains; the dogs have not scattered the herds. I look down; they fear nothing. I toss a lichen in the air; it is driven back to me. They cannot scent my approach; I tread cautiously; I crouch down; I slide over the slippery face of the rocks. Hark! what noise? they heed it not. A rolling mass comes bounding on; I fix my eye on it. Is the hard granite set free, as well as the pent-up water-springs? I plant my staff again; I start aside. The rock rests where I stood. I move forwards. The alarm is given. They start off; they are staggered; they separate. On they come; two foremost of the rest. I lie directly in their path. A low whistle; and they stand, they fall!—They have received their hire. Let me go free!"

* *Gave*.—The generic name for rivers in certain districts in the Pyrenees.

The eyes of the experienced hunter dilated at this recitation of the exciting perils and pleasures of the chase, and the boy François sat by his side, looking full in the face of the speaker, his legs and arms twitching in his ardent desire to realize, in his own person, the enthusiastic relation. But neither of them spoke, and the whole assembly was mute, till Etienne, after a moment's pause, renewed the inspiring theme.

"The proud man! What will the proud man do? Will he stand, as a servant amongst servants, in the great man's house? His walls are broken down. When will he build them again? Go! Hew timber and fetch wood. Go to the mountain-quarry and the mine. Go bid the forge work iron. Wherefore dost thou not? Has the poor man trodden down thy fences? Has he profaned thy dwelling-place? The eagle soared aloft, she spread her large wings, she eyed her resting-place afar, she sped onwards. Her home was in the high rock, no foot could approach it; her winged chariot alighted at the gate. Yet the strong beams of her chamber had been displaced, her secret had been told to another. She stayed not, she rose up, shrieking, flapping her wings mournfully, wheeling round and round. She cried a long and bitter cry. A rushing sound filled the air. Her place knew her no more. Go choose another home, proud man. Perhaps thy child waits for thee. On her new-found threshold she stretches out her arms: 'Come, come.' But the valley is not meet for thee. The earth is not thine. Thou canst not say to it, with the poor man, 'Come, pillow my head, come, give me rest.' Thy head has been pillowed in down,

thy rest has been ease and plenty. Wouldst thou say to it, 'Yield me thy fruits?' Take the sickle in thine hand and reap. But thou art too proud, proud man! Wouldst thou be strong to labour? Drink the red wine of the grape. The poor man drinks of it. He feels his blood warm, he feels his heart glow; he lifts his arm ready for the strike, his eye darts sparks of fire. Drink, drink! But thy hand is heavy, it drops down, it cannot raise itself up. Thy walls have been thy prison-house. Thou art not free, proud man!"

And here the mountaineer broke into a strain fuller of poetry, warming with the kindling flame which had been lighted in his own bosom, until he chanted, in irregular stanzas, the glory of his country—its snows and its cataracts, its tall pines and spreading cedars, its hills and valleys, and the right which the free man possesses over all; and in a plaintive air, growing melancholy once more, from the very excess of his enthusiasm, ended with a climax peculiar to all nations and individuals, the love of woman, her beauty, her faithlessness, and his devotion.*

* There are poets, as well as hunters, amongst the natives of the Pyrenees, who give vent to their excited feelings, as I have thus attempted, for the illustration of my story, in some faint manner to describe, and who emulate each other in doing so at their convivial meetings.

CHAPTER XII.

A GUEST, BUT NOT FOR ALL SEASONS.

"The nobility of labour."

LONGFELLOW.



MEANWHILE the proud wife sat pensive in the cottage of Jeanne Bellecour. It consisted of an inner room, which had been given up to the service of the stranger, and an outer one, where the household work was performed. A crazy tenement it was; for though the stone walls stood firm against the warring elements, the beams and rafters creaked like the planks and stays of a vessel, when the storm lays too heavy stress upon them. Time had plainly stamped its mark upon it, as well as upon its inhabitants. The chinks had been often repaired, like the fortunes of its humble inmates, by industry and the skill which necessity teaches, but like them still, it was not proof against the winds of heaven, any more, than on such a night, their garden crops and fruit-trees would be scathless. Their homeless visitor felt strangely the contrast between the warm lodge she had been accustomed to, amply furnished, and beautified by the touch of a well-filled hand, and the scanty room she now occupied, its meagre adornments, and the lowing

herd, which, frightened by the fray, kept moaning out their complaints in the shed close by. Yet pleasant neighbours they were to their owners, for in them consisted chiefly their wealth; and they were the lineal descendants of the few which had constituted Jeanne's marriage-portion, besides a small stock of money, the earnings of her maiden life, and had given her the right to the title of heiress—a name implying glad independence, and a rank amongst the children of the soil who till and sow for their own profit, and reap the fruit of their labour.

She thought not of sleep, but busied herself in preparing white bread for her guest, while her old man slumbered on the settle. He awoke occasionally, roused by the night's disturbance.

"God shield us, Jeanne! We are like to be without a home, as that poor lady is, if the tempest last twenty-four hours longer."

"God is a good worker, but He loves to be helped," she replied, rather laconically. "If we had trusted to ourselves alone, the wind might blow as it listed."

"But would ye have parted with Flora, the white-starred heifer, to build these old walls? Did not you say she was the rose and the lily of the field, too, and your father never had a greater beauty in his stall, no, not even the Queen of the Dingle, from whom she sprang?"

"It must come to that at last, Bernard. You are a younger son yourself, and know that the burden must fall on the land, when the elder one has not worked to pay his sister's portions. Poor Roger is deep in mother earth, and François is like a young

colt that rejects the collar,—can't and wont tell the same tale."

"And I am a slow journeyman, that can do but half a day's work."

"You have toiled the day through," she replied, speaking compassionately, "and may sun yourself at your own door in the evening and rest."

"But who is to keep the timbers from falling, Jeanne?"

"If they fall this night, they will come down upon a head they never thought to light on."

"That is true, wife, and there is a word in the storm we never wot of either."

"Ay, and a rebuke for the wise man, who said, 'Never build your house near a torrent nor a great lord.' For the rich and the poor may meet together in strange places."

"Where is his honour's pride now, I wonder?" said the old man.

"It is where it was, Bernard, fast in his bosom. But what is it, but as the shivered trunk of the mountain pine, before the blast of the breath of God's mouth?"

A movement was heard in the next room; and Jeanne, arranging the breakfast she had prepared of milk, eggs, and hot rolls baked on the hearth, entered the apartment. But she found her guest in readiness to depart, her care-worn countenance betraying the fact that she had not closed her eyes during the whole night.

"I must go," she said in a determined accent; "I might as well live in my own mill, and lay my head

upon the axle-stone of the mill-wheel, as try to sleep here. The noise of a thousand wheels and doleful creatures is in my ears."

"The kine are restless from the storm, lady."

"And your house is restless, too," she replied; "the very jest of the storm."

"It was once a tight cot, but time and bad weather pull us down, and do not build us up."

"You do but mock me with your words."

"No, lady, I speak of myself, and I know the truth of what I say; for the cold wind creeps into my bones, as the daylight does through the crack in the roof yonder. But had I known that you would do me this honour to pass the night beneath it, I would have spent my last franc to mend that which time will never mend for you nor for me."

"Here, I will give you the means," said the proud dame, offering a piece of gold, which was rejected in the true spirit of hospitality.

"You will not let me repay you for your kindness," she said, a little softening to the balm and oil poured into her wounds.

Jeanne replied by placing the breakfast before her, and moving aside as she sat listlessly down. A silence of several moments ensued, interrupted only by the straining of the beams; and during this interval the heart-sick woman strove vainly to partake of some refreshment. The theme of her sorrows was quickly renewed. "Poor Lisette!" she said, in a desponding voice, "what will she say? A bonfire, truly, to scare all good and evil from our house for ever!"

Jeanne drew nigh, once more to attempt some consolation.

"If I mistake not, she has a husband who will lighten all her burdens."

"And young hearts are full of happiness."

"Not so always, for there is one in this village whose smile, if it does come, is like a winter's sun, though his season is the early summer."

"And who is that?"

"Antoine, the poor mule-driver."

"I remember him. Lisette was very partial to the boy. What has happened to him?"

"The way-side is bleak and unsheltered; and he, a motherless boy, has no love to tend him when he returns weary and empty to his home. His father is harsh beside. He lies upon his bed, a useless thing, pale and exhausted."

"It is well we have no errands to St. Jacques," remarked the selfish instinct of the woman, upon her cares intent.

"And it is well the sky is so full of angry sprites," said Jeanne, "for he can rest while they strive for the mastery. A cross lies on his bosom," she continued, as if soliloquizing; "he lets it lie there, he does not put it from him; but he thinks, perhaps, that some day it will be taken away, for he feels weak like an infant, and his mother is in heaven, and he will lie in her bosom soon, and then the cross will be planted by his grave instead."

"Is he like to die, think you?"

"I saw a rose-tree close by his window. It had one bud upon it, and it leaned towards him. It

seemed to mourn and weep as it told its tale. It looked full of compassion, as if it said, 'Fear not, for a rough hand shall not gather thee; the winds of heaven blow, but they are gentler than the touch of man; they bear the yielding thing on their wings: lie still, and rest.'

"You are superstitious, woman!"

"If it be so to read the message true, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.' No!—Albert Duclos will give the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul, and God will accept the offering, it is my belief. He will give the weary rest."

"Is he so unnatural a parent?"

"He cannot labour himself. He does not know how brave a thing it is to toil. Give thy child thy blessing, and say, God speed thee. It is more than the worth of gold to him and to thee. But Albert Duclos says, 'Hast thou brought me the money, boy?'"

"Ah! an evil thing," sighed Madame Grand-champs.

"And blessed to eat one's bread without carefulness," retorted the healthful spirit of independence in the soul of Jeanne. "Poor Antoine's loaf savours too much of the coin that purchased it."

"Could you not warn his father of his danger?"

"It is of no use, when the thief has entered the house, to shut the door. Albert Duclos will learn too late the wisdom of the proverb, 'Do not make a larger fagot than you can lift.' Antoine may gather the bundle of sticks, but he will not bind them long. And where shall we find the like of him when he is gone?"

"And what will his father do without him, do you think?"

"God makes his sun to shine on the evil and on the good," replied Jeanne. "But look again," she continued, as she recalled the pensive form of Antoine lying on his sick bed, "it was a bright morning yesterday, and we were all gay then." Her guest sighed. "My old heart was blithe as a bird's, to see the young hearts so glad, all but one, and that one the best in La Roche. Oh, it was sad! I laid him on his pillow; his eyes were shut, and his long eye-lashes shadowed his pale cheeks that looked so thin and hollow. His bones were sharp, and the skin tight over his fair forehead. As I laid him down, I thought of Him who was 'oppressed and afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth.' When I went again it was towards evening; the sky was darkened, and he looked paler and more sickly in the gloom than before. He seemed forsaken, for he was all alone."

"Antoine," said I, 'have you felt ill long?'

"I have had a sharp pain here," he replied, laying his hand upon his breast. 'It has made the way seem long of late.'

"But you have not complained.' He looked wistfully in my face. 'When was it that the way did not seem long?'

"He pulled a book from out the folds of his sash that was lying on the bed. It was a Testament, and had been his mother's once. I took it, and opened where the leaf had been folded down. He pointed with his wasted finger to some verses at the end of a chapter, and murmured, 'Ye shall find rest unto your souls.' I understood it all then."

She paused, but her companion, soothed as with a pleasant sound, begged her to proceed.

“You were stronger last year, Antoine,” I said.

“Yes,” he replied, “I could walk and read then. But now the letters dance, and my head swims. Yet the words are there, and here too,” he added, laying his arm across him once more. “When I feel the pain, they comfort me.”

“And what did Rosetta think of your forgetting her in this manner?” I asked.

“She would turn and look at me, and run her nose into my bosom, and once I thought she wanted to eat the book.”

“It appears, indeed, as if it had run some such mischance, for it is almost worn out with journeying to and fro. Does your father ever read it?”

“If he did, he would be happier,” he answered.

“But surely he has been happier and richer too, since you have had so many errands?”

“He looked as if he doubted that I meant what I said.

“Rosetta is happy,” he replied, “for she knows who feeds her. Sometimes I let her wait awhile, just to try her. And she will stamp with her foot, and turn her long ears towards me to hear what I have to say. And I say nothing, and take my dinner out of my pocket, and sit down, and begin to eat. But it is all of no use, and she knows it too. She puts her long ears back again, and looks so pitiful, that I take the bag of meal from the pannier and give her some, and then we go on comfortably together.”

“Albert Duclos! learn a lesson from your dumb

beast," interposed Jeanne, with peculiar emphasis, ere she finished her story.

"Antoine, you can rest, for a storm is at hand. It will last three or four days, may be."

"Think you so?" said her affrighted guest, fearing a lengthened sojourn in the weather-beaten cottage.

"Ay, and many more, if the wind holds on at this pace. The voice of an angry man is not so easily appeased. But hark! it lags behind a little."

"Then I will go," she quickly replied. But her intention would not have been immediately fulfilled had not François, at that moment, entered the house.

"And where do you come from?" said his mother, in a half reproachful tone. "From lying down with idleness, and rising up with her again?"

His reply corresponded, no doubt, with that of a notorious character of old, whose only account of himself was, that he came from going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it, for he did not dare tell he had spent the night in carousing with Gaspard and the rest. It was well, indeed, for him that the opportunity of redeeming his reputation as the champion of distress now offered itself. No less sturdy a frame could have matched with the rotund proportions of Madame Grandchamps. And even with such an escort, her dignity promised to suffer some abatement from the ruthlessness of the gale, which exposed the wayfarer to missiles torn by its violence from the houses, rocks, and trees, and left him defenceless, except as he could avoid the danger by his own adroitness.

"Tell Elise not to fear for us," said Jeanne aside

to her son ere he left the cottage ; " for if the timbers be crazed, a guest has slept beneath them that will not soon forget what they say to one another."

The two set forth. The proud wife of Grandchamps looking, as she staggered on, " the very jest of the storm," to use her own words ; her youthful attendant, as she leaned upon him, like an oaken staff, the stoutest sapling of the forest. Jeanne, as she watched them weathering the gale,* and climbing to the castle gate, said within herself, while her heart travelled back to the bedside of Antoine, " The meek and lowly in heart shall find rest unto their souls."



CHAPTER XIII.

ONE THAT CANNOT DWELL WITH THE LOWLY.

"What's yet in this,
That bears the name of life?"

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.



THE Val de Fleurs, so called by the simple natives from the profusion of wild flowers which grew in every nook and shady corner, was rich in beauty before the day when the fair flower of the Bocage was transplanted to its fruitful soil. Separated by the winding river from that part of the valley in which the village and the chateau beyond stood high above the stream, it was reached by the bridge of rock, before mentioned, at the mouth of the gorge, and after traversing a path on the opposite side, as if the traveller would return upon his footsteps, and behold once more the place he had left behind with so much of regret, there opened, where the rocks shelved down into the smooth and verdant banks of the river,

"A sylvan scene;——
Shade above shade, a woody theatre
Of stateliest view!"

This screen, of nature's own contrivance, sheltered

the spot from the baneful influence of the north and east winds; enemies that were never reckoned by the paladins of old amongst the number of those they had to contend with, since their castle was built in direct defiance of them, and exposed on all sides, except to the balmy breezes of the south. But the architect of a later day, taking warning from their indiscretion, erected the farm-house in which Gaston and Lisette now resided at an opposite point of the compass, and the range of mountains, which were entirely concealed from view to the inhabitants of the chateau, exposed their snowy peaks to those who dwelt beyond the shadow of its rocky defences, and wafted thence a cool current, tempering the sultry air and the heat of the noonday sun.

The house itself was no model building of modern date, unless from its picturesque appearance, standing, as it did, in its sunny place, with its many-pointed gables, and strange irregularities, its balconies, and wooden staircase, its sloping thatch, and the deep shadows under its projecting roof. It was no temple of Arcadia, though the scenery might well have matched with one of classic taste. The orchard, on the side nearest the approach, was neat and trim, with a low palisade; and the apple and pear trees seemed dwarfed to correspond, the old wood being continually cut away to give strength and redundancy to the fruit, while the young branches were trained in different forms, some spreading out like a fan, and others gathered round, in the shape of a cup or bell-flower. On the other side, and more out of sight, the cattle yard, thickly strewn with dead fern for

litter, was surrounded by barns and farm buildings, thatched like the dwellings to which they belonged; and, as if to give importance to their low roofs, sloping almost to the ground, a high gateway formed the entrance, and the hen-house, with its facing and door of lattice-work, stood sentinel over all. And here the swineherd drove his unruly cattle at the close of day from the forest glade, with its many winding paths outside the gate, where, in the early morning, they assembled, by sound of horn, to feast upon the chesnuts, acorns, and beech-nuts, which fell in plenty from the over-laden boughs. And here the shepherd folded his flock for the long winter, when the tinkling sheep-bell ceased to ring upon the mountain paths, and the call of the cowherd was no longer heard, and the large sheep-dog sauntered listlessly about, there being an end of his calling till the summer months should again come round. But at the present moment the yard was empty of everything save grain and forage, and the poultry which clustered at night about their place of roost. The high hill which rose behind the house formed part of a lower range of mountains, which united itself, at some distance, with that more gigantic one stretching from sea to sea. It was green with the bright verdure of the summer shoots. At its base, the vines putting forth their strength, discovered the young grape just appearing amidst the full leaf; and higher up, beneath the out-stretched arms of the beech, which grew in great luxuriance, Lisette could sit and watch the vine-dressers at their work, or interchange a word with them when they came to slake their

thirst at the jet, which rose in the centre of a smooth ring of turf, and fell with a soothing monotonous sound close beside. And higher still, the venerable oak reared its massive trunk, and wild and feathery box-wood, growing to a size unheard of in our clime, cast its deeper shade, or glittered as the sun shone upon its polished leaves. But the ocean, and its ever-varying surface, is not more changeable than was this sea of light and shadow which the winds of heaven swept over ; from the gloomy pine-tree towering on the height, or rent and torn asunder, like the spar of some wreck, to the drooping birch, bending its light branches over the bed of the river, in some sheltered creek, where the banks are covered with green knolls, and tall trees cast their slanting shadows, and flowerets creep over moss-grown rocks, and the boat may ride at anchor, for it is safe from the wind and the wave. And where the valley opened and rounded off with the undulating range of hills, the prospect changed, and far away from the rough crags and mountain-peaks the river wound its way, peacefully again, amidst fields of maize, and meadows, and hamlets dotted here and there, and thick groves of walnut-trees, while over all the sunlight poured a full stream, and gave glimpses of similar miniature scenes in the openings of the lower hills.

“ Is this the haven where you would be, Gaston ? ” said Lisette, in her most laughing mood, the morning after her marriage ; “ the river makes a noise amongst the rocks as if ten thousand powers of evil were at work in it ; and as to the view you spoke of, an army of clouds is invading the fair land.”

"But we have no war of words here, no tongues that cut like swords, my Lisette. Give me the bush where the nightingale sings, and leave the wide world to my neighbour."

"You may well say so, on such a day as this, for the world outside these walls is no enviable place to dwell in. What will become of our walk to the mountain tarn, and our row in the skiff on its still waters?"

"Ah, what indeed? But our own hearts shall make merry, and our voices shall bear them company."

"If the wind will let us listen to the sound of them. Do I not scream already, as if some awful precipice lay between us, and I were crying, Gaston?" raising her voice to the true mountain pitch.

"Then lower your tone a little, and let me speak, if I cannot hear you sing."

"There is no nightingale in the bush to-day, for certain," replied Lisette, laughing again, and bringing a smile to the graver countenance of her mate.

"But who comes here?" she exclaimed. "My father! Sure, it is not my father!" And they both ran to the window and strained their faces against it, to discover through the mist who their visitor really was, as he came toiling along the path by the side of the orchard.

"It is he!" said Gaston, as he hurried to the door to wait his arrival, followed in haste by Lisette. Grandchamps, wet and trembling from his efforts to stem the violence of the gale, sank down in a chair at the entrance of the house without saying a word, and

his daughter and her husband looked at one another in mute astonishment. They saw that some catastrophe had occurred, but could not guess at the truth, and did not dare to ask him the reason of his silence. Their worst fears were, however, at once aroused, by the incoherent words he let fall seeming as far from the fact as possible, while they were still in some manner connected with the circumstances he had to relate.

"It was only yesterday! The sun shone yesterday! What a storm to pelter upon a poor man's coat!"

"Yes, father. Let me take it off and dry it."

"Nay, nay, child. What the sun shone on yesterday the storm may pelt upon to-day, and it will dry to-morrow. It's no matter."

"You were not wont to say so, father."

"No, we were dry sticks yesterday, and now we are like the wood in the green tree. But green wood will not burn."

"Are we so changed since yesterday?" enquired Lisette mournfully.

"Ask Etienne, child. He trained the wild rose and the clematis for thee. He has planted and sown and reaped. Why shouldst thou not say to him, 'Tell me of the old days; I want to hear how the garden thrives: the lilac tree?'"—

"Has the wind torn my lilac tree, father?"

"The wind is nought, child; it will die away as it came."

"What is it then you speak of?" cried Lisette, the tears starting to her eyes.

"What will never come again," he replied, hardening as he spoke.

"We do not understand you, Sir," said Gaston, with the humility of former days, and awed by the tone and manner of his father-in-law.

"How should you?" he replied. "Those who sleep in peace do not reck of the battle's thunders."

"And war has not reached our valley," observed Gaston.

"A fire has been lighted upon the hill-top," was the stern reply.

"There were many fires yesterday, father," said Lisette.

"And one spark that will never be extinguished," he answered quickly, nourishing the serpent in his bosom.

"Has Etienne angered you?" she asked in a beseeching voice.

"Do the clods of the valley lie still when the storm is rending the cedar on the mountain brow? Then let them lie there."

"But he has a generous heart. Did he know that you were in trouble, he would be the first to help you."

"Think you so, indeed?" said her father with a cynic smile.

"Ay, and I am sure of it. Like Carl, our shepherd's dog, he will do you an infinite deal of service, upon ever so little food and petting. Nay, what is more, he will do it best without either."

"Then he shall have less than the least from me, Lily," he returned, addressing his daughter with a

term of fondness he seldom used. "I must leave this place."

"And why, dear father?"

"Because I am a poor man, as I told you just now."

They were more perplexed than ever by his words.

"When the beacon-fire blazed, and they hasted to the rescue, did I bid them come?—No! But gold for the foremost man, and silver for the second! 'And what is thy hire, fellow, that standest there idle, only to reflect the flame? Thou art but a looking-glass whereon it plays.' 'I am Etienne your servant, Sir.' 'Then fetch water, more water.' 'The flame is not your hireling, Sir, nor mine either.' 'But you are mine, and do you bandy words with me?' 'Does your honour think the flame will spare the hireling's wages?' 'Dog indeed!'"

As if a lightning-flash had struck poor Liestte, the terrible truth was in a moment revealed to her; but she controlled herself with a strong effort, while her father, melting into pathos from the excess of his overwrought feeling, continued to speak:—

"It was only yesternight the storm was rising. How many a gale has the old ship weathered! Once I said to myself, 'I will build an ark that shall sail through rough winds and waves,' and you have rocked in it many a year, child! How tight it seemed! The fresh pine-logs were stacked fast by the door—friends for the winter nights, Lily. But an enemy put them there. The spark was lighted at the dead of night."

"Oh, mercy, father!" cried Lisette, bursting into tears.

"Mercy! There is no mercy in the heavens above, nor in the earth beneath. What the fire has spared the storm will gather next."

"And where is my mother?" asked Lisette, recovering strength enough to think on the consequences of the blow she had received.

"With those we have served faithfully. Where else should she be?"

"Then all is gone," she said, weeping again.

"Even your father's pride," returned Grandchamps, with a bitter scorn. "He cannot help you now."

"But our home is your own, Sir," said Gaston, in the spirit of obedience to the law of the land, which enforced filial duty in the same emphatic manner as the commandment with promise.

"And we will work for you," added Lisette.

"The daughter of Grandchamps toil and sweat, like the meanest peasant in La Roche! That shall never be. Make you a green alley, and twine it with roses, child."

"The wild woods will save me that trouble, father."

"It is a garden of Eden," he replied.

"But tell me," she said, imploringly, as the favourite haunts of her childhood recurred one by one to her imagination, and she trembled for their fate, "is the mossy seat beneath the service-tree standing?"

"Had I nought else to do but to count the firebrands that fell as thick as hailstones, think you? Ask Etienne, I say. He knows how many stones are left one upon another."

Lisette knew that it was of little use to combat

with any preconceived notions of her father's, therefore she gave up the point, secretly determining, in her own mind, that Etienne was no guilty party, but that accident, as was indeed the fact, had occasioned the misfortune. She could not, it is true, precisely understand his conduct in this melancholy conjuncture of events ; but she knew too well his generous heart to doubt his good intention, and felt assured, from past experience, that he would rather brook indignity than dishonour. He was indeed one of those "braves montagnards," as we have already seen, fiery, impetuous, not soon forgetting an evil done him, but in liberal hands a servant and a slave, and worthy of a better master. Henceforth, however, a new order of things appeared ; the fire had worked a revolution the more surprising because it was unexpected, and the pride of Grandchamps was humbled.



CHAPTER XIV.

A WORD FOR THE WISE.

"'Tis but fortune; all is fortune."

TWELFTH-NIGHT.



UT let us follow François in his arduous task of conducting fallen greatness on its melancholy road. Strewn with *débris*, the relics of former peaceful times, the way might well have presented to the mind of his companion a picture to call forth many an expression of surprise, at its resemblance to her own condition. But, like the hurricane itself, the storm of affliction had come, and deprived her of all power of reflection, all thoughts save one, to struggle on, to stand erect beneath it, or to sink down for ever; and the fatal truth yet remained behind, like an undiscovered secret, to be told when the heart had found time for breaking, and when all need of energy was gone, unless for the single endeavour she was wholly unacquainted with, to walk humbly with her God, to obey His mandate, and to lead the rest of her life not according to its proud beginning. They walked on in silence, strenuously occupied in sustaining, each one, his own difficult part, until, well-nigh ex-

hausted, the gates of the castle once more opened for the reception of a homeless wanderer.

"And what brings you here?" said Elise, as with a bounding step she came forward to meet François, after he had delivered up his charge to the porter at the grand entrance, her tight boddice making her light figure contrast the more remarkably with that of her sturdy brother.

"The same chance that brings everybody, sometimes, where they least expect to be."

"Well, the world is full of chances, and you may light in the right place at last, François; but you do not go the way to it, wasting your time here."

"Fairly spoken, mistress Elise, and I suppose you do not wish to hear anything I have to say, therefore I may take my cap and be off."

"Nay, nay; you are too much in haste. But I have been hasty myself. Sit down now. You were always a bird to carry the matter."

"Matter, indeed! Yes! Did you close your pretty eye-peeps last night, when every other eye was awake in La Roche?"

"No, François. How should I, when, what with the fire and the storm, it seemed as if the end of the world was come?"

"Ah! you would have said so, indeed, if you had seen the flames as I did. We were like, one time, to be going up to heaven in a whirlwind of fire."

"Oh, you frighten me!" said the pretty Elise.

"No need of that," replied François, kissing her.

"Then do not vex me, but tell me what you

have to say. How came you at the Bocage last night?"

"For the same reason I am here. Do you think I had an invitation from his honour?"

"No, François, you might have waited long enough for it."

"So I thought. And now's the time said I to myself, and now's the time said many more."

But here François became a little abashed at the remembrance of his assertion, in his interview with the count, and broke off rather abruptly in his communication. Soon, however, spinning a fresh thread in the web of curiosity, in which he delighted to entangle his fair sister, he said cunningly:—

"Who do you think was at our cottage last night?"

"Who could have been?" said Elise, musing.

"Ay, that is the question. It is what *can* be, not what *should* be in this world. For look, now! The way to his honour's house was like the strait gate and the narrow path we read of, and few there were that found it, till last night. And now it is like the wide gate and the broad way, and many go in thereat. That is what *can* be! And there is your poor servant's house, mistress Elise! It is not for you, who dwell in a fine castle, to think on such as us, nor for his honour, nor for his honour's wife to trouble themselves about it either. That should not be! But the rain and the wind come in and sit beside us nevertheless. They sport themselves in our presence, without our leave, and at our expense. That is what *can* be!"

"But should not be, François, if you did your duty, as you ought."

"Well, it is easy to say so; but *like* and *ought* do not agree in my mind, any better than *can* and *should*. And anyhow, the house will be mended without my help."

"What do you mean? It is more likely the roof will be blown off in this storm!"

"Nay, now what I say can be; for mother bid me tell you not to fear."

"And why am I not to fear? Tell me that."

"Because fear does not become you, my little sister. It makes you open your eyes very wide, and wrinkles your forehead, and shuts up your mouth tight, and is altogether very unfit for such a pretty face as yours."

"A pretty picture, indeed!" said Elise, giving her brother a gentle slap with her small hand. "How long do you think I am going to stand here, to listen to your nonsense?"

"Till you answer my question. Who came to our cottage last night?"

"You may answer it yourself, François; for though you do not attend to your duty, I must to mine." And Elise turned to go away; but François was not to be put off so easily.

"Your servant then," he replied. "And I suppose you have no kind word to send to Etienne, no slight token of remembrance, as it may be—as it should be, I would say. But, indeed, there is no need of it. Etienne will be free as the wind, when he has digested the good supper we partook of together last night."

Elise stood mute with astonishment at this new turn to the conversation.

"Etienne is a wise man," continued François, seeing the effect his words had produced. "He knows how to choose his proper calling. I wish I might do the same. I would seek it beyond these mountains."

"And, after all, find it lay on this side of them," said Elise. "When did a wanderer ever leave La Roche, and not wish himself back here again?"

"When there is no cord to pull him back, if he flies too far away," returned François, slyly. Elise blushed. She longed to ask her brother what Etienne was going to do, but she could not prevail upon herself so far, therefore she took to stratagem, and changed the subject.

"I wish you could have seen my lord the count when he returned from the Bocage last night. There was no help, he said, until it was all too late! As if it was not the duty of every man to help his neighbour! He wished, with all his heart, he had set them a better example. And then the lightning flashed as if the flames were coming straight into the castle hall."

"I hope his honour has learnt to read his conscience by the same candle," retorted François. "It is time he should, when the flames have taken the roof from over his head."

"And by what light do you read your own, François?"

"Good Fortune attend us, sister Elise; she is a worthy dame with plenty of ballast, if you trust her in foul and fair, but she likes not a friend for the fair

day only. I came to this house in her company an hour ago, and such a skirmish we had together, with the wind and rain, that, but for her help, I must have been blown straight over."

"You are a foolish boy, François!"

"No more than many another."

"But you have been taught better."

"There is one you will not blame, at any rate." (Elise blushed again.) "He will be hunting on the high hills to-morrow, if the storm abate."

"His honour has no need of a servant," she replied.

"Just so, and Etienne no mind for a new master."

"He has borne the burden and heat of the day, François, and has had gibes and scorn enough. If the door stands wide open, he does well to make his escape. But you would be for battering it down at once. You have no patience even to wait till it is opened."

"Because my dame Fortune can open doors without the trouble of knocking or waiting either. Guess now who I found at our cottage this morning?"

Elise guessed wrong. "His honour perhaps."

"No. His honour's wife! That is what can be." And François laughed at the fish his bait had hooked; for Elise was evidently taken at a disadvantage, and said nothing.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RICH MAN IN HIS CASTLE.

"Si Dieu en élève quelques-uns, c'est donc pour être l'appui et la ressource des autres. Il se décharge sur eux du soin des faibles et des petits; c'est par-là qu'ils entrent dans l'ordre des conseils de la Sagesse Eternelle."—MASSILLON.



THE day wore away, and another and another in like manner. Storms were very frequent in these mountainous regions, and sometimes lasted for several days.

The people looked upon them as a common occurrence, and were not often seriously anxious as to the result. But on this occasion there seemed to promise no abatement of the violence of the tempest. A week passed away, and still it raged as furiously as ever. Such a calamity was, at this moment, least expected, for it was the early summer. The flocks and herds had, for the most part, been driven to the mountains for pasture, where the peasants usually assembled for the purpose of making cheese, and beguiled the day with merry choruses, the jocund laugh, and the shrill call, which the heights resounded: but nothing now was heard save the crashing of the thunder-peals as they reverberated through the hills. Life was at a

standstill. The rain descended in torrents, and inundated many a cottage-hearth, the lightning played around the broken crags and rocky piles of the loftier range, darting down the deep clefts and gullies, and again about the white peaks of the towering summits, illuminating the darkness of the night by its bright and vivid flash. The river, in flood, hurled the rocks, that had long stayed its current, from their fastnesses; and, where its smoother course enabled it to spread wide over the fields, it carried with it the crops giving promise for the harvest, and added fear and desolation to the already failing heart of the husbandman, dependent on his toil for subsistence.

The castle, too, notwithstanding its solid masonry, could not completely defend its inmates from the terror the hurricane inspired. The hollow wind, moaning round its towers, and echoing through the long passages in the vaulted chambers, seemed like some warning voice, prophetic of evil, speaking in tones essentially the same as when it bid the proud spirit of Grandchamps arise and depart. Unable to sport with the massive walls as with the frail beams of Jeanne Bellecour's cottage, it revenged itself by playing at hide and seek amidst their receding angles, now dodging here, now there, then with one fell swoop making home, and, with a sudden dart, penetrating through some unexpected opening into the furthest recesses.

"Shut the door quickly," said the housekeeper Mathilde to one of her satellites, who was venturing in search of live or dead stock for the day's provision; and, perplexed with her household cares, she added,

"Our larders will soon be emptied if the count continue to ask folk to the castle at this rate." There was some truth in her prediction, for the besieging elements continued to wage war as steadfastly as ever, and the lord of the chateau sat meditating how he could best serve those who were suffering from its ravages.

The room he occupied was one of familiar use. It answered alike the purposes of a library and a hall of audience, where business or pleasure was transacted ; but sometimes also a retreat where no one ventured to intrude. For the deep seclusion in which the count and his family lived engendered in him habits of a studious character, and gave to his naturally reflective turn of mind a graver cast, and pursuits of more absorbing interest than ordinary. The room was large, with rough oak panelling, on which hung suits of ancient armour, in memory of those heroes who once, in that redoubted castle, bravely defended themselves against the invasion of some neighbouring foe ; besides muskets and other implements, whether for war or the more peaceful profession of the chase. And with these relics of a barbarous age the signs of increasing civilization mingled well in contrast. Book-cases of a height that the student's hand could easily reach the desired volume were ranged round the room at even distances, and in the spaces between, tables furnished with writing materials, and pedestals supporting casts from the antique, or curiosities variously displayed, which the count had gathered on his travels in Italy and elsewhere. But with neither pen, paper, nor books was he engaged at this moment.

The lazy indulgence of turning over the leaves of a favourite author, or the fuller enjoyment of energetic thought, was impossible. The open page, with annotations in his own hand, lay before him, waiting the remark of the commentator ; but philosophy had lost its charm, and he sat gazing fixedly on the window, the deep embrasure of which, and its stone mullions, though they partly hid the prospect from his view, could not entirely conceal it. Enough was visible to impart to features otherwise hopeful and radiant with intellect something of the gloom that brooded over it ; and even Agatha started back when she beheld the effect which the dark colouring from without had produced.

"You are just the person I want. Come in, Agatha."

Agatha obeyed, and, sitting down, strove to cheer her brother, by diverting his mind from its one object. But his heart pondered too deeply the matter in question to be easily moved away from it.

"What is all this poring over books, and revelling in imagination, without the wholesome intercourse of man with man?"

"What indeed?" she replied, thoughtfully. "But your world is, of necessity, a very limited one, fenced in as it is almost as in the feudal ages, when these walls resisted many a fierce invader."

"It is for that reason I must break through them, Agatha. The flames have done for Grandchamps what they had better have done for me."

"Have patience with the old walls, since God has made them the bounds of your habitation."

—“ This huge Castle, standing here sublime,
I love to see the look with which it braves,
Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time,
The lightning, the fierce wind,”——

“ A proud boast, indeed ! The descendant of a line of heroes, and a castle that defies the wind.”

“ And a soul that looks beyond,” she added. “ But some hand, heavy as the gale that presses against that window-pane, is weighing down that which is not brick and mortar in you, and you hear a voice speaking loud and bitter things.”

“ Yes ! loud indeed !—Go lodge in the bosom of thy fellow man.”

“ Ah, St. Eustace ! We can but stand in the outer court of this temple of the Lord, and listen to the sighs let fall within ; we can but weep and pray upon the threshold, and offer the gift upon the altar of our own hearts. But you, perhaps, think it easy to enter in, because the poor of this simple village are artless, and unversed in the world’s ways.”

“ I know nothing of the poor man. I am the rich man that fares sumptuously every day.”

“ But you give of your abundance to him that needs.”

“ As the rich man gave the crumbs that fell from his table.”

“ And much more, your example.”

“ It may be so, but one thing is wanting. When the storm is past, we will go forth and serve the poor man.”

“ With all my heart. You will not find yourself a stranger to him.”

"For that I may thank you."

"No, by your deeds you are known. We mark the fruits that fall from the tree of life in others. Are the poor more blind than we?"

"I would they had been blind, Agatha. But a candle has been lighted on these hills that they may read the more plainly."

"Grandchamps is ruined. It is a lesson for us all."

"Grandchamps is the man I trusted, and he has deceived me."

"How so?"

"I was looking on the burning pile, on the night when the fire enveloped his dwelling as with a shroud, and he himself might have been as the corpse within it; a man stood by me, but his face was so blackened with smoke that I could not distinguish the features. He, too, was looking on the flames. The sun rose and changed their scorching red into something of a whiter hue, its own beams being hid and almost extinguished by the deep folds of the heavy clouds.

"'You have wrought hard,' I said, 'if I may judge by the singed hair on your forehead, and the mask upon your countenance.'

"'I need a breathing time,' he replied. 'The sun hides his face awhile, and so would I, if I could, from this work of destruction.'

"The words struck me. There was a meaning in them I desired to know, and the voice had the calmness of truth in it.

"'You have an interest in the place, perhaps?'

“ ‘ I know every plant, and herb, and flower.’

“ ‘ It is a painful sight to see the tree fall,’ I said, trying to assimilate my words to his.

“ ‘ We love rather to watch the perfecting of the seed, and to reap the fruit of our labour,’ he replied.

“ ‘ And the labourer is worthy of his hire, I answered.’ He looked in my face.

“ ‘ I speak to the Count St. Eustace.’

“ ‘ Yes.’

“ ‘ Does the Count St. Eustace think that the labour of the poor man is only the sweat of his brow?’

“ ‘ Tell me what you mean, my friend.’

“ ‘ You see that poor woman,’ he replied. ‘ I call her poor, but she is rich. She has her own free-will to give or to keep. She bestows it on that poor lady, who is truly *poor*,’ he said with an emphasis on the word. ‘ She gives to her out of her own tender heart. She is leading her away from the sight of so much sorrow. But how will the gift be repaid? With the mark of bondage! The gold that eats into our hearts, and cankers there. Will Jeanne accept it? No!’”

“ ‘ Was Jeanne, indeed, there, and on such a night?’ interposed Agatha.

“ ‘ She seems a noble creature,’ I said in return.

“ ‘ One that labours and looks to God for the reward,’ he answered. ‘ We toil day by day, and He feeds us. The flower brings forth the fruit. How many a spring-time have I watched it here! We serve man, and he repays us with the gold that perisheth.’

“ ‘Because money will purchase what God provides.’

“ ‘Will it purchase the kind word? The poor man gives his best, that which money will not buy, early and late, and ought he not to reap the same? Is it not better to serve God than man?’

“ I could not deny what he said.

“ ‘Does not Jeanne say so?’ he added. ‘She has known poverty of late. Her old man has the creaks of age about him, and her best hope that was, her son Roger, is now the seed cast into the ground, against the resurrection morn. But God will repay, as man does not; and if the old house be blown about her ears, there is one will help to rebuild it.’”

“ Oh, I recognise another friend!” said Agatha. “It was but this morning Elise was imparting to me her sorrows. The fickle boy is about to turn hunter; to verify his own creed, I suppose, and their marriage will be delayed in consequence.”

“ He is going to the hills for poetry, but not for love, it seems, and a poor return they will yield, compared to regular labour,” replied the count; “but he is evidently on bad terms with his master, and Grandchamps must be of an unforgiving spirit, for I heard him speak harshly to the man as I turned away.”

“ Grandchamps always reminds me of the proverb, ‘Dress up a stick, and you can give it the air of a baron.’ He is so unbending.”

“ And one grudge explains another. Is that Jeanne’s cottage I see yonder, distorted, with one beam on end, like a wrecked vessel? And this his kindness!”

Agatha was about to reply ; but ere she could do so the count was gone. Straight down the rapid descent he flew rather than walked, regardless of his own safety, at the mercy of the gale, like a leaf tossed before the wind ; until, borne onward by his own velocity, he was brought to a standstill, as of necessity, at the almost roofless cottage. Voices from within assured him of the safety of its inmates ; but how long they would have a place of shelter appeared a doubtful question.

“ A lath from the forest would have spared all this mischief,” said the feeble voice of the helpless old man.

“ And a word from his honour would have got it easy enough,” said a younger and more hasty one.

“ We should not speak evil of those whom God has touched with his heavy hand, François,” said a third ; “ but lend me a helping hand yourself, for the kine must not feel the weight of this timber, whether we do or not.”

“ Let me help you,” said their good angel, as it seemed, the count entering at the moment, and assisting to secure the starting plank. It was soon done with the aid of his strong arm ; but many a rent there was that could not be so easily repaired, and the bed on which Jeanne had lain was exposed to the wind and rain. Yet she would as soon have been induced to leave her own children, as the cattle she had reared.

“ They are but dumb brutes, be sure, and they may stand here safe enough,” she replied, when the count pressed her to leave her uncomfortable dwelling, “ and François can tend them, if he will ; but

a home would be no home to me without them. I have foddered them in winter, and they might as well be on the hills, face to face with the storm, if I left them to shift in such extremity. It is a providence, I have said to myself, that I had not sent them there as yet, with the rest of the poor beasts, that can scarce live out this reckoning."

"Their loss will occasion much distress."

"And much grief of heart. The very pride of man will be humbled. For that which comes of our own right and heritage, as it were, is more hard to part with than gain gotten unexpectedly."

"A loss less easily repaired, no doubt. How can I best assist them?"

"By a word of encouragement from your own lips. And there is one who lacks it more than any other, your servant Grandchamps. To him trouble is come already. While we, who see it but afar off, had need be taking heart, looking upward, out and beyond things."

"It seems to me that you are the fittest person to give him that word of encouragement, if you can speak of trouble as afar off when it is here, within your own door."

"A hope of better times lies fast beside it. It is not so with his honour, if report speak truly. When the bird of the air falls, will it rise again?" said Jeanne, half aside. "He has lived apart from us," she continued, endeavouring to escape without offence from the difficulty of explanation. "Who amongst us will venture to give him that word of comfort, if he does not seek it for himself?"

"His daughter, perhaps, will be his best comforter."

"Pardon me. Years give us the advantage. I am very bold," she added, seeing the look of astonishment depicted on the countenance of her visitor.

Such lore and from one unlearned ! It confounded our book philosopher. "Truly," he observed to Agatha, as he sat once more in his library, filled with the gleanings of many lands, and recounted the scene he had just witnessed, "we must see nature in the rough, and in her broadest outlines, to judge of her noblest traits. The good-will of this poor woman towards one who despises her wants implies a health of soul and satisfaction with her lot that is beyond all other need. But she shall not miss her reward. And if her merit were reckoned only in sinew and muscle, the recompense, as I have learned, would be soon made."

"Jeanne is nobility itself ; I am glad you have seen her," replied Agatha ; and embodying her own sentiments with her brother's thoughts, and looking back to the thread of their discourse, she repeated to herself the following lines :—

"Farewell, farewell the heart that lives alone,
Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind !
Such happiness, wherever it be known,
Is to be pitied ; for 'tis surely blind.

But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
And frequent sights of what is to be borne !
Such sights, or worse, as are before me here.—
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn."

CHAPTER XVI.

HAND TO HAND, AND HEART TO HEART.

“God invites and cherishes the hopes of men by all the variety of his providence.”—BISHOP TAYLOR's *Holy Living*.



THE storm was abating, the rain already assuaged ; the winds, like children tired of play, yet unwilling to give up their sport, and as if unable to lay aside the excitement of the game, were still contending with the almost leafless branches ; now with deep sighs resounding through the forest glades, and amid the wooded uplands encircling the valley, now sinking down from very weariness, and ready to flee away to those unknown regions from whence they came. The thick clouds, just here and there parting overhead, disclosed patches of deep blue, telling of the serene sky beyond ; and peace and happiness seemed about to reassert their undivided reign over this once flourishing and favoured district. But as yet no dove, with its olive-branch, brought tokens of returning prosperity to the desolated hamlet ; each messenger told fresh tidings of despair and woe ; and hope, as Jeanne had foretold, was deserting even those who had most right to place confidence in her guardianship.

During this fluctuating state of things Agatha received a message from poor Lucille. The whirlwind had passed by her almost unheeded. Perhaps she was scarce conscious of it. But in the calm which succeeded there awoke the voice of other days, and in an interval of this awakening she had asked for her best earthly friend. The call was at once responded to, and Agatha and the widow Anna turned their steps towards her humble abode; but ere they could reach it Lucille's recollection had faded. A striking picture presented itself, as they entered the still chamber, from the restless world without. There lay the tenant of a mortal tabernacle for the greater part of a century with closed eyes, the hue upon her aged cheek bespeaking the rest to which she was fast hastening, its paleness contrasting only with the purely white coverlid of her clean couch. Her grandchild sat motionless beside her, and the single sign of life stirring in the room was a lark, which sent forth its joyous notes with double vivacity, as if to break the ominous silence, and to proclaim to its downcast inmates what yet it is to live.

Agatha and Anna sat down, and waited for some mark of recognition. But if remembered at all, they were but as one of the many ideas that floated across her brain, conveyed to it by passing sounds, or by such images as dim memory presented. She spoke at length in broken sentences, and her words seemed to imply, that, while reverting to the season of her youth, she was also, in some faint manner, aware of what was taking place, at the same moment, outside her cottage.

"The early days and the sweet spring-time. They come again. How freshly the wind blows! I feel the stray hairs lifted on my cool forehead. The birch-tree waves its slender threads to and fro. Hark! The air is full of voices! I hear them in the forest. Now they come nearer." She ceased; her attitude betokening entire repose, as if her soul were passing away from earth with all its faculties attuned to joy, and the memory of pain forgotten, as she herself had said.

Presently her lips moved again, and she spoke in firmer accents: "He hath prepared for us a city." Agatha seized the moment to attract her attention.

"Do you know me, Lucille?"

A sweet smile overspread her aged features, but she did not further recognise her friend.

"Yes, there is rest," she continued; "there spring abides, and youth. We shall never grow old there—never part again. Yet a little while, only a little while."

Her mind was straying into the future; another future than that which had once occupied her; and Agatha, finding her effort fruitless, motioned to Anna to withdraw.

"Only a little while," repeated the poor widow to herself, as she toiled panting up the steep ascent. "Lucille is right. A little while and a little courage! The distance seems long to look forward to, but we tread it, and it is soon gone."

She cherished the deceitful thought. Yet, even though it were but as the glimmering of a candle in a dark room, it brought light to her dwelling. Had

not Victor reminded her that heaven was at hand? Was it a light from heaven that gleamed upon her soul now, as it had shone upon his, when he uttered those last words? She would seek not to repine.

And ere a few days more, they sat, for the last time, by Lucille's quiet bed. She was in a deep slumber, from which her mortal part will never awake, until her eyes behold the King in his beauty, and small and great stand before God.

Not long after, too, Anna was laid upon a bed of sickness. Was it, indeed, sickness, or was it sorrow that placed her there? We may well ask, for who could tell? The many sleepless nights she had passed, when the wind muttered and howled around the ancient castle, through its loop-holes and time-worn crevices, the little Roland slumbering upon her arm, and memory rife of past events, had told upon her exhausted frame. He, also, partook of her sensitive nature; for though he had been born amidst the storm and tempest of life, and nursed to the sound of trumpet and drum, "the pomp and circumstance of war" had no charms for him, any more than the nodding plumes of Hector for the young Astyanax, and the pealing thunder and lightning flash started him from his dreams, just as the booming of distant cannon had been wont to do aforetime. Like one who

—"Loving much the flower that loves the shade,
And loving much the shade that that flower loves,"

he delighted to shelter himself at his mother's side, and to rest in the shadow of her gentle presence; and it was with extreme grief that he found himself one

day debarred her society, and obliged to take refuge with his servant Davy, the usual companion of Pierre and himself when others failed them.

"We have climbed almost to the sky," he said, as they turned to look back on the scene below, after a walk begun in jest and ending in labour in earnest.

"The castle appears like a speck in the distance," replied Davy.

"And we are very near to heaven," continued the child; "it seems as if we could fly there directly."

"But the way is very different, if we come to think of it," returned Davy. "It is more like that steep path on the mountain yonder, or this one just above us, which looks as if no man could ever climb up it. Why, a fly could only cling to it in some places."

"But there is a white cloud hanging over it, like some beautiful angel, to help us on the way. How gentle it looks as it flies away!"

"The clouds please your little heart, do they?"

"Yes, Davy. I like to lie out of doors, and look through them up at the blue sky. There seems nothing to keep me back then."

"But we have no Jacob's ladder to go to and fro between heaven and earth."

"I wish we had."

"Why do you wish so?"

"Because mama is ill, and I cannot be happy," replied the child, bursting into tears.

The servant took him by the hand. He knew his tender heart, and was besides astonished at the boy, usually so silent. Did his words foreshadow

the future? or was it only that the sorrowful tenor of his life engendered these ideas?"

"Do you hear the whistle of the shepherd yonder?" he said, trying to divert his mind from the subject that oppressed it. "He has saved a few of his sheep from the storm! See! They leave off feeding at his call. And hark! He utters a shrill cry, and there are more leaping over the rocks and scampering towards him. So now he has gathered them altogether, and he is going before them to lead them to some resting-place, where those two fine dogs will guard them from the wolves and bears that prowl about and would attack and destroy them if they could."

"But, Davy," interposed Roland, as if not heeding what was said to him, "I feel lonely now mama is ill. If it were not for you and Pierre I should feel quite alone. Everything is strange to me here."

"Ah! God lets us feel lonely sometimes," replied his servant compassionately; "and sickness and sorrow separate us from our fellows, just as that poor sheep, I see, has gone out of the way to die. But the shepherd will seek it. He is like the good Shepherd we read of. But here comes your brother," he said, resuming the brisk tone that was natural to him, "let us hear what he has to say."

For Roland did not reply, and though he had dried his tears, seemed still overwhelmed with grief.

"I have wandered a long way to find you," said Pierre, as he approached the place where they stood.

"There are many ways to the same end, and you have chosen the longest," replied the servant.

"I suppose I have, Davy. I have been looking

at the river, too, down below. It has sent such a pile of rocks into the middle of the stream that they look like a bridge across it, except that the water runs over them as well as under them, and every way but the right. François would not let me venture upon them, and the path above the river has been washed into the stream. You can only clamber along the banks."

"You look as if you had had rather a dirty walk, master Pierre."

"Ah! So you would have said if you had seen the quagmires the water has left where the river has overflowed its banks in the valley. It has swallowed up whole fields of corn. There never was such a greedy monster. And François says there is not a cottage that has a whole roof left at top of it. The rain has been enough to wash them all into the stream."

"But they stand safe above it, like the house founded upon a rock," returned Davy, unwilling to lose an occasion for one of his favourite similes. "The floods have beat about them, but they have not fallen."

"No, not even Jeanne Bellecour's."

"After all," continued Davy, "God's hand, though it smite, is more merciful than man's, for war leaves behind it more terrible traces than these."

"I have been thinking, Davy, I should not like to be a soldier for that reason."

"You have changed your mind, have you, sir?"

"No, not exactly that. But I might do something better perhaps."

"I will tell you a story," said Davy, after a moment's

thought, "or something like one, and so finish our talk, for we have been standing here long enough. Let us move homewards:—

"When I was in hospital, as I was telling you, after I had been wounded, there was a poor soldier who in his youth had been afflicted with sore disease. When a boy his sports had been hindered by severe abscesses, and he could only lie on the green bank and watch his playmates, and wish to be amongst them. But, as he lay there from time to time, he began to think of the many wounds which had been healed in his poor body. He saw how the surgeon bandaged and soothed them, though sometimes it was necessary to cut and probe the diseased flesh before it could be made whole. And, above all, he noticed the wonderful power that Nature has given to the human frame to recover itself, so that the most frightful sore leaves scarce any mark behind—the blue veins can be traced beneath the skin with almost as much clearness as before, and the flesh becomes round and plump again, as if the evils which defaced it had never been. And when he saw this, he would reflect upon the marvellous talent which some possess to aid in this beautiful process of restoration, and the wish grew up in his mind to help his fellow-creatures, as one who understood the art had helped him. So, when he got better, he went about the village, from one neighbour to another, and if any had a cut or a sprain he begged to bind up the maimed hand or foot, and in this way gained so much experience that at length they all sought him in time of need. Well, this poor man, as I said, was in hospital when I was

there, for he had been slightly wounded, and, as he lay between the sick and dying, he remarked how much they needed help, how long their wounds remained undressed, and their aching bodies uneased by change of posture. And when he was a little recovered, he asked leave to assist in tending these unhappy sufferers; and many a kind act he did, and many a word of comfort he spoke, over the painful task it was sometimes his duty to perform. 'Have a good heart,' he once said to me, 'the deepest wound is better than as deep a sorrow. But, after all, time makes both much alike, and the seam that the knife has made is all that will remain of what now occasions you so much pain. So keep up your spirits, my lad.'

"And what became of him afterwards?"

"I do not know. He left our regiment; but wherever he is he will have with him the hand that mends and makes ready for use when God pleases, and a good word beside!"

Pierre did not reply for the space of a minute, for he was lost in reflection over the last sentence, but then his native ardour broke forth.

"I shall be a missionary, like Fernando, at last, and preach to the people about the house on the rock we were talking of just now."

"Be work-ready, my boy," replied Davy, seeing him spiritroused. "To be work-ready isto beddeath-ready. And God will choose the rest."

"I wish François were what you call work-ready, Davy. I think he is an idle fellow."

"François is a smooth stone, that will aye be rolling over and over, and lie at last by the road-side,"

returned the servant. "But the precious stones," and he looked tenderly at Pierre, "though they may lie hid amongst the rubbish of this world, will be sought for when they are wanted, and turned to the right account."

"But if they are not wanted," sighed Pierre.

"Then let them lie still, for God seeth them. His eye seeth every precious thing."

They approached the end of their long walk, and the sun was casting its slanting shadows on the castle walls, as they reached the gate.



CHAPTER XVII.

LABOUR, OUR COMMON INHERITANCE.

"That best and noblest of all schools, save the Christian one, in which honest Labour is the teacher,—in which the ability of being useful is imparted, and the spirit of independence is communicated, and the habit of persevering effort acquired;—

"Noble, upright, self-relying Toil! Who that knows thy solid worth and value would be ashamed of thy hard hands, and thy soiled vestments, and thy obscure tasks,—thy humble cottage, and hard couch, and homely fare!—

"I soon found that there was much to be enjoyed in a life of labour.—Still, however, with all my enjoyments, I had to suffer some of the evils of excessive toil."—HUGH MILLER, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*



OTHER," said François to Jeanne Bellecour, as she was washing in the brook beside her cottage door, now that the storm had subsided, and the stream was beginning to flow once more in its smooth ordinary course, "I wish your work was as easy as my sending the shaft from my bow, and as soon done. But look here," and he pointed to the heaps of unwashed linen still lying beside her, "you will not have finished by supper time, and 'tis now scarce noon."

"François," she replied, "it is hard work! But I have done it all my life long, and what should I do without it?"

"You could spin, mother."

"I could not always be spinning."

"You could sew, mother."

"No, nor be sewing either. I've been accustomed to the work, you see, and work is pleasant. The brook is cool, too. I have felt the soft touch of its running waters before I was your age, and I love to meddle with it. Work is not all labour, child!"

"Nor all pleasure either, mother."

"No! The two are joined together. And what God hath joined, François, let not man put asunder."

He was walking heedlessly away, but his mother stopped him.

"Where are you going, François?"

"To the Val de Fleurs."

"Has Le Jeune sent for you?"

"No, my foot seeks him."

"And for what purpose?"

"You do not want me, mother."

"Child, I want my son," she replied with some warmth. "Better go watch Flora, with the poor idiot boy, on the hill top. Thou wouldst travel half the world over and find no rest."

"Mother, Gaston has need of hands to help in his fields and vineyards. The storm has damaged them like all the rest."

"He wants none such as thine, François. Give him the heart that will beat firm when the foot has ceased to fling its steps abroad. Thou hast no true mountain blood in thee!"

And Jeanne sighed sadly, for she felt how soon the parent roof might be deserted, and her son lost to

her, more than as already in all those qualities most dear and sacred in her estimation.

But let us return to Gaston himself, and view him in his new-found home, that one which was to have been cradled in sunshine, and unvisited by the breath of an unkind word. How dreary and calamitous had been the events which had met him even on its very threshold! We shall find him, on the first day of returning calm, on the top of the mountain, conversing with the shepherds, and looking with dismay on his perishing cattle—the few that had outlived the storm—and counting the many that were either missing or had sunk down from cold, and want, and exposure to its fury, and were in all probability to rise no more. He had visited the spot last in all the glory of early summer, when the animals escaped from their stalls, devoured the fresh pasture, and, lifting their heads, inhaled long breaths of the pure exhilarating air in that lofty region; when the sheep and goats, browsing on the short fine grass, seemed full of contentment with the lot that had fallen to them in pleasant places, and the wolf-dogs, with large attentive eyes, their heads reclining on their huge outstretched paws, watched their motions, intent upon guarding each helpless one from his insidious foe.

The ground they occupied gave to the scene the aspect of a mountain-home. The fir-trees and the rocks enclosed a shallow basin or hollow in which the herdsmen and their charge were congregated, and, lulled by the sound of the babbling brook close at hand, they here reposed, until the necessity of a change of pasture called them to some other resting-

place. Le Jeune marked the alteration since he had beheld these brute creatures glorying in their liberty and strength, the pride of his heart and the household to which they belonged.

A tall lean figure covered with skins, his face half hid by a quantity of dark matted hair, approached him as he drew near; and his two attendants, gaunt Cæsar and still more famished Beau-Chasseur, slunk after him, as if in hopeless and irretrievable disgrace. For where were Rose and Floribel, the stars of the morning, as they were wont to be called? Where, the lambs of the flock? Their four-legged guardians could only whine, and put to themselves, perhaps, the same interrogatory—Where? But Louis, the chief herdsman, stretched out his hand, and, forgetful of all ceremony, seized his master's wrist, and burst into tears. Le Jeune, too, was for the moment deeply affected. Then, recollecting the small stock of provisions he had been able to bring with him, some bacon, an onion or two, and a flask of brandy, he led the way towards the hut, built of stones rudely piled one upon another, which served as a shelter for the shepherds, and where, on a bed of leaves and moss, the same materials that helped to exclude the currents of air which forced their way through many a crevice, there lay another forlorn individual, in a half-dreamy unconscious state.

"Henri, it is the master," shouted the one more alive to the miseries of his situation. But the sinking man neither moved nor spoke.

Le Jeune stooped down, and applied the flask to his lips.

"Another day and it would have been too late," sobbed Louis, weeping like a child; "this piece of mouldy bread is all we have left."

"Here, drink some yourself," said his compassionate master; "we could not foresee this calamity."

"No, surely not," replied Louis, returning him the flask, his eyes brightening and his tongue beginning to move more freely. "Who'd have thought of it? And the spring-time so well over. I scarce know how time has gone of late though," he added, scratching his head, "but I'm thinking it is more than three weeks since St. John's Eve."

"You are right," replied Le Jeune.

"I said to Henri that night, 'This will be a grand storm as ever I saw.' The sun had gone down; I was standing on the edge of the rock yonder, looking down into the valley for a lamb that had strayed from the fold; it was dark, very dark; there was nothing to be seen; when, in a moment, the lightning flashed round me, binding my eyes, as it were, with a fillet. The wind, too, began to blow violently. I was obliged to move away from the place where I stood. I whistled for Beau-Chasseur, for I thought I heard the snarl of a wolf close by. The storm that sends the Christian to his dwelling brings these savage brutes from their dens. So I whistled, and Beau-Chasseur came running towards me with a low growl. I knew he scented the beast. 'At him, Beau-Chasseur,' I cried. I had not need to say the word. Some fiery eyes glowed in the darkness, and he sprang at his throat. They rolled over and over, down the slope, struggling which should be master. But Beau knew it was sure game: and the wolf knew him too;

there's not many will face him : but, as I said, the storm makes these brutes bold ; it rouses them up."

" But the lamb, Louis ; where was the lamb ?"

" Ah, the lamb, master ! The ewe had yeaned her but seven days before, and if I did not sorrow for it, she did ; for she bleat in my ears till I could have reproached her, and bid her bear her trouble more discreetly. If she cared so much for her own trouble, did she care nothing for mine ? This was the beginning of sorrows. Ah, Beau-Chasseur !" he said to the dog, who was looking pitifully into the tent, " you know I am telling tales of you." The poor creature hung down his head and whined.

" I hope you will not blame me, master," added the man, melting afresh into tears, as if reminded by the dog's pathos of their mutual disgrace.

" I might as well blame the tempest, and the God of tempests, good Louis."

" We braved it night and day, master, I and Henri, till we had not strength to battle with it any longer. Day after day we said, it will have passed away to-morrow. But a week went by, and we lost heart, and then another, and we said, we are dead men. ' God help me !'— His voice was all abroad amongst the hills, one answering to another, and the lightning darting, now here, now there, down this way and down that, cutting and crossing like sabre-strokes, if I can fancy what these may be ; sharp and forked as a spear-thrust sometimes, then round about the mountain like a flame of fire. They made the night clearer than the day. I could count the cattle, oftwhiles, as they lay around our cabin. First one was missing, and then another, for the bears and wolves prowled

about us, and we could not hinder them, and some had drooped their heads to die. I could mark a moan and a shudder. Ah, master! I don't know whether I or Beau-Chasseur sorrowed most. And as for poor Henri, he could scarce keep life in him, as you have seen."

Le Jeune replied by opening his parcel of provisions, and distributing them to the men and dogs; for the tear stood in his eye as well as in the shepherd's.

They were interrupted in their meal by the cry of a vulture overhead. He had alighted by the side of Rose and Floribel, the comely and bright-spotted kine, that now lay stretched on the bare ground, their young limbs not yet stiffened in the grasp of death, for, answering significantly to their peculiar appellation, life had only become extinct in them as the day broke. But they were not destined to the ignoble end of glutting the appetite of this voracious bird; for though unscared by the efforts of Cæsar and Beau-Chasseur, Le Jeune, levelling his musket, shot him dead, in the act of commencing his revolting feast.

"There will be but few cheeses this year, master," said Louis, with a sigh, as he came and stood by his side. "The youngest and the best die first. Old Marguerite will weather it out at last, and Blanche, and all the rest; and a score of sheep, perhaps, and the goats, if they have found a shelter. I have kept this young thing in the hut with us," he added, turning to caress one that had followed him, and was seeking for a morsel of bread from the hand that fed her.

The dogs would have been lost without it, and ourselves too, may be. She has shared every bit we have had ; though it is but little she has yielded in return, of late ! more like the spent bottle in the wilderness than anything else."

" I see you do not forget the lessons you have learned in the valley," interrupted Le Jeune.

" How should we, master, when the hill-top affords so many sights to remind us of them ? But come this way. The brook has not been able, with all its violence, to upset the tubs of milk within their stone walls, but I am afraid it is all spoiled."

" Never mind, good Louis. Things are better than I expected, and you have done all you can to prevent mischief. I will return home now," he continued, after surveying the damage to its greatest extent ; " you shall have help ere the day is gone."

" And if I might be so bold as to ask for the loan of the musket," said the cowherd with some timidity, feeling the importance of the boon he demanded. " I have handled one in my youth, and to see those clean pretty limbs torn piecemeal would be as though my heart were torn from my own body."

It was evident he had regarded the deed done with some excitement, contemplating the pain of an opposite catastrophe. Le Jeune could not resist so touching an argument, and, delivering up his musket, slung the body of the ravenous bird, now deposed from all its kingly attributes, across his shoulders, as a trophy of his victory, and, returning to the valley, mused on the changes that one short month had made in the state of his affairs.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CURSE BECOME A BLESSING.

"One lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee,
One lesson, that in every wind is blown;
One lesson of two duties serv'd in one,
Though the loud world proclaim their enmity—
Of Toil unsever'd from Tranquillity."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.



CHANGE indeed!" said Madame Grandchamps to Lisette, as they sat in the little parlour, or visiting room, looking out towards the rocks and the distant peaks beyond, now brightening once more in the sun's rays. "Take off that stuff petticoat and peasant's kerchief. Were you not wont to say, are such and such things fit for Grandchamp's daughter?"

"But times are changed, as you said, mother. Have you seen Gaston?"

"No. Is there fresh trouble in store?"

"There is work, Gaston says, for weeks, months, years, perhaps. Work, and no one to do it for us, for each man must work for himself."

"Work, child! And what do you know of work, save the planting of a flower, or the pulling off a dead

leaf? Ply your needle, and leave the distaff and the spade to those who know how to handle them."

"No, I will help Gaston."

"You lack the strength to do so."

"But I have the will, and that is half the battle, as he says."

"You are a wilful child," replied Madame Grand-champs fretfully.

"We shall see," said Lisette, kissing her mother.

"It will be the better for us all if I am perhaps. And here comes François the unwilling. Is he going to turn wilful, too? What brings him here I wonder?"

These words were spoken in a gay manner, and like Lisette; for, as we have said, she had a courageous spirit, that which lifts itself above difficulty and smiles at its forbidding looks, and was, indeed, far more worthy to be the child of Jeanne Bellecour than her indolent son. He presented himself to her with a grave air, and as one doubtful how he should be received.

"Is the master at home?" he enquired.

"If he is not, he will be here presently. What is your errand?"

"A fool's errand, it may be, to offer myself where I am not wanted."

"I do not know that," said Lisette, "for the time is come when the labour of every man in the valley is wanted. Is there no work at home for you?"

"None, but what I can do better here," he replied.

"You are a strange lad. And what are your pe-

culiar propensities? Our swineherd is going to the hills to carry food to the shepherds. Will you be pleased to take his place?"

"I would rather do his errand to the hills."

"But you do not know the haunts of our shepherds."

"I have the foot to seek and to find, like one of them. But swine are unruly cattle. I'd be going astray myself, instead, of keeping them from the wrong path."

Lisette laughed. "I will keep you by me, and you shall help me to pick stones in my vineyard."

François looked dismayed at such a proposal.

"The hills are the place for me, Mistress Le Jeune."

"There is plenty of work on the hills and in the vale, too," she replied, recovering herself, being thus reminded of her matronly dignity. "You shall plant, or sow, or reap, as you choose. The crops that are left must be reaped before the maize is sown. But can you reap, can you plant, can you sow?"

Poor François was utterly confounded. His conscious inability to labour, and his shamefacedness in acknowledging it, kept him silent. He forgot his usual volubility in her lively repartee, the act following the word in her mind as quickly as her hand always responded to its slightest suggestion; to think and to do being one and the same thing with her.

"I will do what the master pleases," he faltered forth. "I heard he was in want of a servant, and since the count has set our house right," —

"What!" exclaimed Madame Grandchamps,

coming forward on hearing these words. "And has it been done without my husband's consent?"

François augured as ill from this speech, and felt how little he owed to his favourite dame Fortune for the good that had befallen him and his family, as she did from the fact that had just been discovered to her. But good luck befriended him at the present moment, and he gained his point. For Le Jeune coming in, and being assailed by the steward and his wife with the war of words he most dreaded—"You will not take that boy into your service, Gaston; he is the idlest rascal in the village,"—and being afraid also to lose the labour even of such a one as he, François was sent to take Henri's place upon the mountains while he came to recover health, upon more easy terms, in the vale below.

"A change, indeed!" sighed Madame Grandchamps once more. "If the count take matters into his own hand after this fashion, there's no use in our biding here any longer."

"It is what I said from the beginning," replied her husband, "we must leave this place."

"But where will you go, Grandchamps?"

"Where they will not say of you nor of me, 'Times are changed.' Let us go to St. Jacques!"

A few days more, and the weather was such as poets love, producing strong contrasts, the gay and the severe. Such is the aspect of human life, and genius loves whatever has the stamp of truth upon it. As the troubled ocean that cannot at once subside into tranquillity after it has been lashed into fury, the traces of disorder were still apparent; but the sun shone forth

triumphantly, and, prodigal of its own beneficence, gave promise of a brighter future, when its beams, spreading far and wide, should again fill the land. The mountains, rising in the distance, were broken into light and shadow by the clouds, as they travelled rapidly over their surface. The thick haze, dark almost to purple, covering their rocky sides, left visible only a darker breadth of pine-forest crowning the summit, or some hoary peak, cold and unfriendly, that reared its head into the chill atmosphere beyond. While here and there the veil would be withdrawn, and jutting crag and promontory stand out in the bright sunlight like the pillars of some fairy temple built in the skies, or of that unearthly one from which, it is said, he who enters within its portals shall go no more out. And nearer, upon those similar in feature, but less precipitous, the sunbeam told a tale of ruin hitherto unperceived. The pine-tree, torn from its foundation by the violence of the wind, prostrate and shattered, jagged, and almost cleft in twain, or blackened and scorched by lightning; stones hurled from the mountain brow, fragments of rock rent and precipitated down its steep sides; the deeply indented water-course, down which the stream had leapt and foamed, accelerated by the flood of waters; and nearer still, the deep green of the walnut-tree changed to the sere and faded hue of the autumn leaf; the tough branches of the ash bent and broken, its delicate leaves shrivelled and swept away with countless others, the glory of the forest. All these were tokens of the strife that had been. But even now the sounds of life were beginning to make

themselves heard again ; its signs were again perceptible. For, close at hand, the voice of the woodcutter broke upon the ear, the smoke of burning charcoal rose cheerily amongst the trees, and the echo of falling timber, as it was tumbled headlong from the heights above, reminded the listener what labour can do to repair the waste of nature.

Lisette worked in her vineyard with an heroic patience. Of the two helps that had been afforded her she was glad soon to be rid. For one, an old woman of threescore years and ten, was almost blind, as well as deaf, and Lisette's injunctions to train the young tendrils carefully, so as not to break the tender shoots, or injure the clusters of grapes, just forming on many a stray branch, were entirely lost upon her ; and she moved so awkwardly in the narrow paths, her full round petticoat coming in contact with the vines at every step, and her hands put forth to guide her, that Lisette was in continual fear for the result. Neither was her younger coadjutor, a boy from the village-school, of more avail. His duty was to pick stones and rubbish, and to clear the ground of all inequalities that had been left by the action of the rain upon the moistened earth. But alike deaf to her entreaties, he would carelessly strike the plants with his hoe, or, to beguile the monotony of his occupation, fling a stone occasionally at some bird passing overhead, thereby, perchance, doing detriment to the fruit that was to yield the precious juice for the wine-vat, or, at least, alarming Lisette, lest such folly should lead to some more serious consequence.

" Oh, for poor Antoine !" she sighed to herself, as

she toiled more and more laboriously in the increasing splendour of the day, that had broke amid clouds and the passing mists of the morning; "his hand is as delicate as his heart is tender. I wonder whether he is on his way to St. Jacques once more."

"Lisette," said a well-known voice, "you look tired. Come, rest awhile at the fountain. I have brought you some wine. Leave your work, and come."

"A welcome invitation, Gaston," replied Lisette, taking off her hat and fanning herself with it, while a tear stood in her blue eye. "It is hard to toil alone, and work seems harder alone than in company."

"You do not get on so well as you expected with old Rosa and her grandson."

"I do not know as to that. Old Rosa was like a blind mole creeping about, only doing infinitely more mischief. And the boy! What shall I liken him to? A bird that flaps its wings perpetually over your head, crying, What's the matter now? But the truth is, I never knew what labour was before."

"Come, come," said Gaston again, "we will talk about it." And he led the way to the chesnut-tree by the fountain, and, sitting down, supplied a copious draught from the flagon he had brought to stimulate, if needful, the energy of a yet untried labourer. The stillness of the day invited to reflection as well as to repose.

"Do you hear the sound of the axe in the wood yonder, Lisette? How regularly its strokes fall! As the stroke of the wheel in the mill-stream down below."

"But to me the shrill voices of the men, as they sit and rest, are pleasanter. Their wild songs make my heart thrill and beat joyously again. And that trickling fountain! Does it not say of idleness, How charming it is?"

"Of rest after toil you mean, Lisette."

"Well, I will say so if you will. But you know not how fatigued I am."

"Then, leave the vineyard to its fate, and go in and sit with your mother. For me, I have but one motto, 'Forward, forward.'"

"Do not go away, Gaston," said Lisette, seeing him rise from his seat, a little irritation overcasting his fine countenance.

"I wish I could help you," he replied sorrowfully, and kissing her.

"I thought when I began this task," she responded in a repentant tone, "I should never allow myself to say I was tired; but now I feel how ignorant I have been of the poor man's toil. I have seen many a woman, too, labour day after day, and never complain. Why should not I? I said to myself."

"You are not accustomed to it yet," said Gaston kindly. "Have patience. Toil and rest, rest and toil; this is the history of a man's life. And let us be thankful we can labour," he added in a lower voice, "for home would not be happy to us now without it. There is a croaking bird in our nest." To this allusion to the domestic discord that marred the peace of their household, Lisette sighed a deep sigh, but she thought within herself, "There may be one in other houses beside our own."

"I have heard that Albert Duclos is a great tyrant," she said, after a short pause.

"He may be so," replied Gaston. "But Antoine is too ill to work. He will be at rest for ever, I do not doubt, ere the summer comes round again."

"Do you say so, indeed!" said Lisette.

"Ay, when our village resounds with labour he lies still. Should we not be thankful we are not as he is?"

"Yes, surely. Poor Antoine! I must go and see him."

"Man is born to labour," continued Gaston. "And one man is born for another man's pleasure," he added, with some bitterness. Then, changing his tone, "Choose you which you will have, Lisette! the pains and aches of the body or of the mind."

And Gaston rose up once more. Lisette, too, got up to resume her task. "Meet me, at sunset, at the bridge of rocks," she said to her husband, "for I shall not sleep until I have seen Antoine."

He promised obedience, and they parted.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE STAFF BROKEN.

"Who in Life's battle firm doth stand,
Shall bear Hope's tender blossoms
Into the Silent Land!"

LONGFELLOW.



LISETTE was as good as her word. When the evening approached it found her turning her steps towards the village, across the bridge, and along the banks of the river, seeking the lost path amidst its overflowing waters, and obliged at last to choose the road that lay nearest to the castle, as the one that had been beyond the reach of the flood. It was by far the longest way to that part of the hamlet where Duclos and his son resided; and ere Lisette reached it the sun was already sinking over the tops of the mountains. "Gaston will be waiting for me, and thinking his time ill-spent, perhaps," she said to herself, as she hurried onwards; "it will be long after sunset ere I can reach the bridge again." But having come so far, she would not turn back.

In all the glow of health, though fatigued with her day's work, she presented herself at the gate of the cottage. Albert Duclos was seated in the porch, leaning with both hands upon his stick, and apparently lost in

reflection, his head bent forward ; but restless even in repose, he was muttering to himself as usual, and twitching first one foot and then the other, shaking his head, and swaying his body to and fro, as was his wont. Lisette had scarcely ever seen him before, and felt a little daunted at the appearance of the gruff old man in the place he occupied. She experienced something of the sensation a timid person is conscious of when, on coming near to a strange house, a furious bark is heard, and a mastiff rushes forth from his kennel, his clanking chain alone preventing the gentle intruder from turning sick with terror. Albert Duclos, on his part, eyed her with a look of surprise, not altogether free from bewilderment. She came upon his reverie like a saintly apparition, one with which he had no congeniality ; and if it be true that the spirits of evil can be scared by the courage and inflexibility, "the avaunt, I say," of good men, this mean soul was dismayed, and slunk away from the beauty, simplicity, and good faith of Lisette. He entered the house, and she stood for a moment, wondering whether she could summon boldness enough to follow him. The thought of Gaston conquered her irresolution. There was no time to be lost, and she went in. It seemed as if the house was deserted ; and emptied of comfort it certainly was, silent and poverty stricken. There were no benches or seats in the kitchen or living room ; nothing but a low worn-out bedstead, and a stool, the decrepitude of which showed why the master of the house preferred the more secure and easy seat in the porch. And within, in a smaller room equally bare, was another couch whereon Antoine lay, and from

which, as we have learnt, his mother's spirit had in former years, taken flight to a happier clime.

Lisette stood in the doorway, and gazed, with tears in her eyes, on the altered face and form of her once trusty messenger. How came he to be so changed? Could it be Antoine that she saw before her? The features were, indeed, the same. But why was the cheek so sunken? The brown hair fell in clustering curls. But why did it cast so dark a shadow over the fair countenance? He opened his eyes, and Lisette knew that it was Antoine.

Antoine looked at first doubtfully, then the lustre of his eye grew brighter, and he spoke to the heart of Lisette, though his lips moved not. She sat down by the bedside, and tried to enter into conversation with him; but the bashfulness of former days, and perhaps extreme weakness, which makes a ruin even of the noblest minds, kept him silent. Yet he still looked earnestly upon her; now with a beseeching expression, as if asking her to bestow upon him something that he lacked, then humble and resigned, willing to forego it, and as if conscious that the tones of affection she had addressed to him he had heard but as we catch a few notes of music as it passes by, and that he should listen to them no more. Lisette watched the change with pity, and an interest deeper than she had ever before felt. She knew not how to tear herself away from his mute sorrow. But evening was closing in upon her. The empty room was becoming dim and shadowless, and Antoine closing his eyes, she stole away, her heart full, almost to bursting, with the emotion that had been pent within it.

Had she been able to give him any comfort? The cup of milk that was placed beside his pillow she had raised to his lips, and it had been rejected. The words she had spoken had elicited no reply. But she hoped, as we often hope in the house of mourning, and with as little proof, it may be, that some sympathy had been imparted, the secret being with Him who fashions souls and fits them to each other. With this consolation, and the happiness that a kind action affords, she trod more lightly over the ground than on her way to the village, and met Gaston impatiently looking out for her, and fearing lest the swollen waters should have entangled her path as the darkness drew on.

"One trouble makes us fear for the next," he said, as he caught her hand and welcomed her back.

"Did you think I should want wisdom to choose the right path? Still a child, though a wife of four weeks' standing?"

"The waters hurrying beneath these dark rocks have made me dream I suppose. And there is one failing I possess, that I have not confessed to you as fully as I ought," he replied, putting her arm within his, and perhaps recollecting the slight irritation the afternoon had produced.

"Gaston," said Lisette, setting aside the thought of herself, "to see Antoine as he is, and to think of him as I have often seen him on the mountain side, with his red cap and sash, plodding after Rosetta, makes my heart ache. His step was never light, it is true; but the poor beast knew that as long as she heard it she was to go straight forward; and if it did not come

close behind, she would stop and turn her head round, and her long ears forward, to enquire the reason. She must have put the question often to herself of late without getting any satisfactory answer."

"Did you find him very much altered?"

"I scarce knew him, Gaston. But the ewe knows her lamb, and the mother her child, wherever she finds it; and there is something about Antoine I can never forget—a clinging plant that has lost its stay, and cannot find its hold again."

"Yes, he had a mother once, as I had."

"He can hardly remember her, I should think."

"Yet there is a charm in the very name, and one other tie only that can make up for the loss of a mother." And he cast a look full of affection on his wife.

"That churlish father must be an unkind nurse for the poor child," she continued; "or perhaps he leaves him to the care of any one who may chance to come in, for he disappeared as I entered the house; and I could have fancied the room where Antoine lay was the chamber of death, it looked so forsaken, and he so pale and motionless. Oh, for the days when he followed Rosetta, and we hailed his coming as the bearer of good things, and tidings from St. Jacques!"

"He was ever sparing of his words, Lisette. Was he more communicative this evening?"

"No, but his silence was eloquence. He spoke in every look and gesture. He blessed me for coming to him. If any eyes ever expressed joy and gratitude his did. I could have given all I had at that moment, to make him what he once was. But he told me,

as plainly as if his mouth had framed the very words, 'I shall never rise from this bed again. I once hoped to be as happy as you are. You seem so full of life. But happiness has been long in coming, and unless you have brought it me—life is going. I am very weary. And he closed his eyes.'

"A sad picture you have made of it," said Gaston.

"But I hear footsteps approaching. Can it be Jeanne Bellecour? She will tell us more about him."

It was Jeanne. She had been at the farm to enquire after her son; and for once her mother's heart was satisfied.

"We were talking of Antoine," said Lisette; "I have just left his bedside."

"I will step in as I go home," she replied, "and see if he wants anything. Duclos lets me do so."

"He is very poor, I fear," said Lisette. "Shall I ask my father to speak to the count for him?"

Had the departed daylight permitted Lisette to see Jeanne's countenance at that moment, with sufficient distinctness, she would have beheld written there, as legibly as the handwriting on the wall to Belshazzar, "weighed in the balance and found wanting;" for the unexpected interference of the count on her behalf had convinced her that he no longer delegated his authority to Grandchamps in relieving the wants of his people.

But Jeanne was too well accustomed to do kind acts to speak unwelcome truths, and she only said, "Duclos is a man who says little, and it is little that Antoine needs; I do not know that either of them are in want."

"But the house has a very wretched appearance."

"So you may say of the hole the fox inhabits," replied Jeanne mysteriously.

"And his trade is quite at a standstill."

"Nay, now, if Rosetta could do the work of half-a-dozen mules she would still find more than enough for her. Albert Duclos will grow rich upon her earnings."

"I see I am mistaken," said Lisette. "The lame man is not so much to be pitied. But of Antoine?"

"The sunshine has brought all the bees out of the hive but himself, who used to be the busiest of them all."

"I miss his kind face so much. He was always coming to the Bocage upon one errand or another."

"Ah, he is like many a scattered branch we see now! As I have said to Duclos, 'The green boughs may ride to and fro, and be fanned by the summer breeze; but let them be beat and buffeted by the storm, and they snap asunder.' But he has not an eye for these things. He could not see what we all saw, that Antoine was following his mother fast to her long home."

"Surely he has not been long ill," said Lisette.

"He has felt more, I fancy, than he has cared to say. I have heard tell of the camel in the desert, that, when it lies down, cannot sometimes be persuaded to rise again. So he fainted under his burden. On your wedding-morn it was."

The tears came into Lisette's eyes once more. "I am glad you often visit him," she said.

"I can say the word he likes best, if nothing more," replied Jeanne.

"And what is that?"

“‘Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden.’”

“He knows his Bible, thank God.”

“And he has known the yoke that we must all bear in some sort or other,” said Gaston, who had been silent until these words touched a chord in his heart.

“He has borne it nobly,” replied Jeanne. “To think of what life is,” she added, in a slow, quiet voice, “and then to think of what it must be to the fainthearted ! But it is better to be fainthearted than weakhearted. Antoine has never been weakhearted ;” and she sighed, probably from a thought of her own son, of whom she could not say as much.

It was becoming gradually darker, and they parted. As Lisette worked in her vineyard the next morning she wept afresh for Antoine. “He will see these curling tendrils and these bright leaves shine no more. The spring-time will come again, but he will be away.” Lisette wept, yet she was thankful.



CHAPTER XX.

LABOUR IN VAIN.

"Fortune will not suit herself to our wishes; we must learn to suit our wishes to her."—ARNOLD'S SERMONS.



AND another pursued his task in his appointed place, and was not thankful.

"This is slow work," said François to his companion, as they were wandering over the hills, seeking, with their flocks, a change of pasture; "we have been moving for this hour past as if we were walking to a funeral."

"You may well say so," returned Louis, "for there is scarce a spark of life left in any of the cattle; and now Rose and Floribel are gone, that used to make all the rest forget their good manners."

"I wish they would forget them sometimes for my sake," replied François, "if it were not for those mischief-loving goats, that delight to tease Beau-Chasseur. See, one has jumped across the rock to the ledge beyond, where he cannot follow it! Ah! Now it jumps back! They are all too good, too good! Here, Beau-Chasseur! cease your angry noise." And François seized a tambourine, and cut a caper in the air after the fashion of his country, while the dog, sharing in his excitement, changed his

tone into a less furious bark, and sported and gambolled rather to the discomfiture of the rest of the party, until Louis shouting the word of command, he subsided into a more tranquil and dutiful deportment.

And onward still moves the little company with slow and measured pace, the shepherd ringing the small bell he carries with him to recall the truant ones of his flock, the dogs barking occasionally, the cows and sheep bellowing and bleating, as fatigue makes them hunger and thirst for the green pasture and flowing water of some retreat nigh at hand ; and horses and mules need to be urged forward with their heavy burdens of dairy and other utensils, for they turn aside to crop the stray herbage that betokens their approach to a more fertile district. It comes at length. A green valley, the slender cascade streaming like a silver thread over the wall of rock that encloses it, contrasting with the dark hues of fir and beech, and many shades of foliage, and falling into the full river, that forms a pool, as it were, flowing calmly for a short space, as if grateful to the many rills that feed with bounteous store its deep running waters. And now there is bustle in the camp ; the unlading of its furniture, the milking of the herds, the folding of the sheep ; and François forgets his *ennui* for a while, and the stone hut of preceding years receives its new occupants ; and the sun, bestowing his parting rays, lights up the spray and mist of some distant and more mighty waterfall with a bright bow of resplendent colours. But the morning brings fresh longings to his restless spirit.

"We shall be in want of provisions ere many days are over," he said to Louis, as if ready for a walk to the valley, and a commission to convey stores from thence. "This bread is turning mouldy, and the cheese—you never ate harder in your life."

"Why did you come to the mountains if you are always wishing to be in the valley?" returned Louis.

"What made you a shepherd, I say?" asked François.

"Nature made me one, but she did not do as much for you."

"Now there is something more than that in making us what we are," said François.

"'Tis our lot, perhaps."

"There is just the circumstance we can't alter. And if we do not accommodate ourselves to the circumstance,—why, I cannot do it, I tell you plainly, Louis."

"Well, you are unfortunate," he replied. "But what was the circumstance you speak of?"

"If I must work, I said, I can do it better elsewhere than at home. For mother she was always taunting me; and father he can't work, and I must work, I was told, for everybody else was at work in the village. But it is of no use, as I said before."

"You have no particular inclination for doing anything, and so you wish to be doing nothing," returned Louis.

"And what is a shepherd's life but a doing of nothing? What is lying here? What is following the herd, as we did yesterday?"

"I'll tell you what, François, when you are older

you will be wiser ; when you have a loving wife and a child, too, if God grant it you, and when you lose them both, which God grant you may not, as I did, then you will know it is better to have poor brute beasts to watch over than no life to cherish whatever. To look at Blanche now, to see her patient face as she chews the cud yonder ; she is less ailing than she was ; thank God, the storm spared her."

"She is as good as a Christian in your eyes, but I'll have the dogs for my foster-children, Louis."

"They are most like Christians, to be sure, for verily they know every word one says to them ; and when I had nothing left to eat, a while back, I told them so, and they licked my hands, and went and lay down and never asked again. They are wiser than we are sometimes. For hark ye now !" and he lowered his voice to suit the mystery of the subject : "if Albert Duclos had looked in his child's face, as old Caesar oft looks in mine, and reads my very words and wishes too, the boy would not lie a-dying, it is my belief, as I am told he does now."

"Holloa !" said François, and started up, as a new comer appeared on the scene. "Holloa ! Etienne, give me that musket. It is just the thing I was wishing for."

"They say of our countrymen, we are most civil when we keep our weapons in our own hands," replied Etienne.

"What ? trusty, my old fellow ? You have not had good sport to-day."

Etienne only answered by the shrill cry peculiar to the mountaineers, making the woods resound again,

and startling the sheep, as it does the timid chamois when the hunter wishes to drive the herd in an opposite direction to that on which he approaches. François felt the influence of the wild noise, and his heart leapt, as with repeated calls the enthusiastic sportsman raised his voice on high. Did it tell of the liberty of the captive, of what he could do, and what he would, of his power to "subdue the earth," by right of inheritance from the sons of Adam? It told all this, and it did more, for it awoke an echo even in the careless heart of his companion.

Etienne still kept the musket in his hand. "Are you going to the valley?" he said, addressing François in as composed a manner as if those lofty sounds had never issued from his full round throat and muscular frame, and drawing at the same time a small parcel from his bosom.

"Is it to say, 'My pretty Margaret, good day?'" enquired François in return, quoting the first line of a favourite ballad, in which lovers coolly upbraid one another, and part in soft tones and gentle rhymes.

"Will you take this packet to Elise?" asked Etienne again, without noticing the insinuation his words implied.

"Elise will not thank me for it;" replied François, with provoking pertinacity.

But Etienne was not to be assailed in this manner. How long was it since François had listened in the cave to his earnest aspirations after liberty? He had found her and he would hold her fast, with a love even stronger than that which binds the heart of a man to a maiden.

"Thanks! what need of thanks?" he said. "Elise is as free as I am if she choose to be."

François knew the warm blood within; he had, too, a generous spirit. "I wish I were as free, Etienne."

"The gipsy-girl, the pretty Zingara, is not more free," he replied, in rather a sarcastic mood. "She may gibe and tell tales and cross her lover's fortune, if she please; but can she make him untrue? Let her bright eyes tell."

"I shall see Elise in a few days. When shall we meet again?"

"On the feast of St. Jacques."

And Etienne was gone; gone to number his prey.

When Elise opened her parcel, she found in it a few feathers from the wing of a golden eagle. It was her lover's token, since he could neither read nor write, that he was gone

—"to the land where the clouds love to rest,

Like the shroud of the dead on the mountain's cold breast;"

and since to be a chasseur was an honour to which every peasant who carried a gun aspired, it may be supposed she was not altogether displeased to receive the expected tidings, however she might regret any petulance she had shown him.

CHAPTER XXI.

COUNTING THE COST.

"This gallant which thou seest,
And but he's something stain'd
With grief, that's beauty's canker, thou might'st call him
A goodly person."

TEMPEST.

"Nothing is left or lost, nothing of good,
Or lovely; but whatever its first springs
Has drawn from God, returns to Him again."

R. C. TRENCH.



GATHA frequently rose early in the morning, and wandered forth at will, and especially since the sky had become once more serene, and the heat of summer precluded her from exercise at a later hour. She was of a nature free, and not to be restrained in those gentle pastimes which suited her tone of thought. Her soul, unaccustomed to explain itself, found a language inspired by the lovely scenery which from her childhood she had gazed upon, and on which she ever loved to gaze, with a still growing and a deeper pleasure. She would seek the fountains, as the shepherds do; and, with a love and a reverence like unto them when they dip their cups

in its refreshing waters, she would lave her hands in some clear pool, cut off by a sheltering rock from the foaming current, and dream, as many a one has done before her, of what pilgrim should next slake his thirst at the cool stream, in the far-off land whither it is going, or cast in some votive offering, and smile as she did so, for Agatha was not superstitious. But if she had been, she might have received some confirmation of her faith on the morning of which I speak.

She was musing, as she lay reclined on the river's brink, on the many events which the one event of the storm had brought forth. There was the fire and the flame that the wind had fanned, the desolation of one hearth, and the pride that had received its death-blow. There was the stricken conscience in the castle-hall, the heart that had been closed, not by pride but by indifference, whose prison-door had been unbarred. There was the falling timber in the peasant's cottage, the grievance that had been long borne and was at last redressed. There was the happiness of wedded life broken in upon, when it had been just grasped as the purest and most precious of all earthly treasures. And at the same time there had been the message of death, left by another hand at the doors of the youngest and oldest, the one that had carried her staff through many a long day, and the other that counted but few years of his toilsome journey over and gone. The storm, it would seem, had bid them rest for ever, and they were not unwilling to obey its mandate. All these circumstances had this one event controlled, "like the one link in my

history," thought Agatha, "which governs all the rest."

She looked up, and saw, within a stone's throw of her, a figure that might have been a palmer's in olden story, so wayworn was it and dusty with travel. "What did he there, and at this early hour? His cloak so threadbare, his cap drawn over his face, his beard untrimmed?" He turned towards her. "Was it indeed Philip de Montmorency?" He advanced a step; she half rose from her seat; he came nearer. "Yes, it was he!—himself indeed!—but how changed!" Changed too, it seemed, in his inmost soul as much as in his outward aspect, for he looked coldly upon her.

"Is it Agatha St. Eustace I see before me?"

"Is it Philip de Montmorency?"

"I may well be excused for asking the question if you do not know me," he replied. "Time and the wear and tear of life make sad havoc with us."

"I am greatly changed, no doubt," said Agatha meekly.

"I wish it were so," he answered, casting an anxious look upon her face.

They stood for a few moments silent, apparently watching the river as it sported past them. But the moments might have been years, so much space in memory did each of them travel over in that brief interval.

"It is seven years since we parted, Agatha. I have seen as many campaigns, and war is a stern thing. But is there anything more stern than the heart which will not yield its secret to another?"

"I know you have reproached me, De Montmorcency, and you seem to do so still. But truth is stern ofttimes, and hearts may be too tender to speak it."

"You did not love me, and it would have been kinder far to tell me so."

"There was one who loved you not."

"Yourself!"

"We speak of days gone by," said Agatha, and she dropped a stone that she had held in her hand into the running stream. "Let us talk of them as if they were like that stone, lying still at the bottom of the turbulent water. It flows over it without disturbing it."

"Spoken like yourself, Agatha. Then tell me this stern truth and I will bear it as a man. I have come far to listen to it, and I must return ere the night falls."

"So soon?"

"Yes, so soon. Why do you say so?"

"I was thinking—but no matter, if it must be."

"Ah, what use of regret in this world? It but robs us of our peace, and leaves no other trace behind."

Agatha essayed to speak, but her voice faltered.

"Do not fear," he said encouragingly. "Time was that while I longed to hear the truth I shrunk from it, but now"—

"I will tell you how it has been with me in these years," said Agatha, in a firmer accent. "I had a mother when I saw you last."

"She is no more."

"She is no more," repeated Agatha. "But her word is my law."

"Is the word of a mother binding in the grave?"

"I believe so."

"You do not love me, Agatha!"

"I could not tell you when we parted"—

"You could not tell me this, or you preferred your duty to your love, and you prefer it still?"

"It might have been weakness that I could not say so before," she replied, endeavouring to be calm, and ungloving her hand as she spoke.

The gem on her finger was shining pure and unsullied. It reassured her. Would not the truth shine upon his heart? If, indeed, her love for him had been the guiding star of her life—if she had suffered and sought to do so patiently as God would have her—if He had removed obstacles which before existed, then would He not finish His work? True. The hope fulfilled must be His gift, and she would not stretch forth her hand to pluck the golden apple if she could.

De Montmorency noticed her eye fixed upon the jewel.

"A rich diamond," he said despondingly.

"My mother's gift," she answered, with some earnestness. "A pledge of her love, her dying witness that the enmity of former years had passed away, and would be buried with her."

"Agatha!"

She could only murmur his name in reply.

"And this is the pain you could not give me!"

"I could not set the seal to my own destiny as well as yours," she said, with deep emotion.

"Your silence has done it better," he replied.

A lofty cascade, at some little distance, between wooded hills, that fell over a jutting rock, making it shake with its big volume of water, ere it came bubbling, hissing, and foaming towards the spot where the two now sat, made deep music, such as I have heard in another temple than that which rose over their heads, as they communed together, with prayers and tears, of the things which had been and those which should be. Every other sound was hushed, and no breath moved, save the faint stir which the spray brought with it. The early sun rose higher and higher, appearing at last above the hills, and the dew, illumined by its rays, hung like a curtain of many colours, green and purple and gold, over the sides of the descending valley. So Nature smiles upon us mortals, and with the same seeming gladness makes a mock of our pains, and laughs at the misfortune she cannot remedy.

"Our last meeting was not like this, Agatha."

"If I remember rightly, it was portentous of clouds and rain."

"Of the Fate that has separated us for so long. Let us hope that this morning gives a brighter promise."

"Yet when things are most fair I mistrust them most. And, on the contrary, feel my spirit roused by difficulty, and hope even in extremity—oh, there has been a pleasure to me in dealing with that tyrant Difficulty!" she added, with some animation, recalling the past in sight of her present happiness.

"Well, I am tired of him I confess. Must I serve another seven years for you, like the patriarch of old?"

"God knows, Philip. But let us hope, as you say. When I left you last there seemed a hedge between us I could not break through; and I, in my despair, went on fighting with the thorns, and was torn and lacerated more and more; but after I had been left awhile on the wrong side of the hedge, as I thought, I began to take comfort. First, from the impossibility of getting through, and then, from not knowing what was on the other side, seeing the way was not prepared for me. But there stood the hedge."

"It was not to be conquered nor won by any effort of your own."

"No. Therefore I made a virtue of necessity, and discoursed with the enemy. 'How long am I to wait here, I asked?'"

"'Clearly, as long as God pleases,' was the reply."

"'Then I will wait,' I said."

"You sat down before your city in good earnest."

"I had the vantage ground, and I was resolved to keep it. I was in the path of duty. But the missiles and the arrows that are cast upon us there! Who can number them? Again and again I took fresh courage, and the time wore on. My brother came from abroad. He brought tidings of you. Your name was always mentioned with honour. But what was honour, what was fame, if I were never to see you more? Be it so, I said. I will not desert my post, but stand or fall as God pleases."

"Upon my word you would have done for our forlorn hope," said De Montmorency, smiling at her warmth and vigour.

"My mother fell ill about this time," replied

Agatha, "and she began to relent towards you. There seemed to me an undressing of her soul in her sickness, which made her view the world, and all that belonged to it, in a truer and more sober colouring. What, indeed, are earthly distinctions then? My life became happier, when it was not entirely devoid of sympathy."

"Did your mother lie long on her deathbed?"

"Yes, many months. And there was the same process going on in her as in myself. The hedge of worldly pride was thickly set about her, you may easily believe, or it would not have been so inseparable a barrier to me. But when I saw her wasted form become more attenuated day by day, when I heard her voice more feeble, and her expressions more tender, like a little child's, then I understood why to me had been given a sickness of soul like unto her mortal sickness, and I prayed that I might be more patient and more submissive, as she was who was being made meet by suffering for the kingdom of heaven."

"I wonder you did not give me up altogether, Agatha."

"Perhaps I should have given up all thought of you, but for this token." And she looked at the ring once more. "Was it God's token, that He would not forget, though I might? It seemed so to me. And ever after I felt better able to give the event into His hand."

"You looked as if no grief had ever stayed by you when we met just now, like the Agatha of days of yore."

"Your memory is very tenacious," she replied smiling, and falling into a reverie, as she was often wont to do, from her habit of seclusion from the world of others. "Yes," she mused, as if reasoning with herself, in the remembrance of former conflict, "there is a liberty of soul that should set aside all grief, in the resignation of one's own will to the will of God; an end of the why and the wherefore, the what shall be hereafter, the give me this, and give me that. Liberty! Not such as when the prisoner reads his release with a doubtful mind, and cannot believe the good news to be for him. Not such as when the slave, escaped from his chains, starts as if the voice of the pursuer still sounded in his ears. But a deep peace, not too good to be true. Because 'all things work together for good, to them that love God.'"

But thoughts speed fast when they run in well-worn channels, and in a moment again she said: "My tyrant Difficulty tyrannised over me no longer. The thorny hedge had become a broken wall, and so would every other hinderance, if God pleased."

"Your voice is as the voice of my good angel, Agatha. Would that I could hear it always! Would that you were by me when"—and he stopped short, for he thought of the fate of battle too oft.

"The day will come at last," she said earnestly. "By my faith in this token I believe it will."

"God grant it may, Agatha."

They rose and wandered along the banks of the stream, until gradually the path ascended and wound up the mountain on which the watch-tower, before mentioned, stood. It was a mossy ruin, overgrown

with creepers and thorn-bushes ; and on the side by which they approached it there was nothing below but the deep hollow, out of which the sound of the torrent still came, to break the stillness of the scene. But on arriving at the little plot of green turf in front there burst upon the sight a view that the traveller might well pause to survey, and caused De Montmorency to exclaim, as a crowd of memories rushed upon him : " Oh, how often have I envied yon proud castle the possession of that which was not mine ! How grimly did its old walls garrison and keep their treasure ! "

" Will you not come within, and see how well they can keep it still ? " interrupted Agatha.

" Alas ! I must away almost immediately," he replied. " But let them keep it till I come again and claim it as my own."

Yes, there stood the chateau with all its grand and beautiful accompaniments, its valley and its river, its mountains and its guardian rock ! And her lover, returned from bloody wars, felt, as he looked upon it, as though a voice from the skies had just proclaimed the good tidings of " peace on earth, goodwill towards men ; " for, besides its calm aspect, the ill-will that had once reigned within those walls was to dwell there for him no more. He gave vent to his feelings, so that Agatha could only weep at last, and, woman-like, imitate his example.

They remained for some time conversing upon all the events that had occurred, and she told him Anna's touching story, and the history consequent upon the storm which had burst over the valley.

"And what a drop of grief does ours seem compared with this," she said in conclusion, "when we sum up all the amount; and still more when we think of the wretchedness that some have added, through their own faults, to their measure of misfortune. Thank God, we have not self-reproach to add to ours."

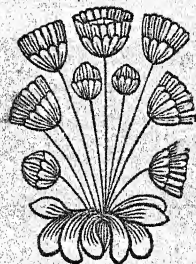
"Agatha, you are too good for me," was the only reply her lover could make, for a fear began to intrude itself, lest, after all, he should be unworthy of her. He changed the subject, and remarking her sombre garments, he asked how long it was since her mother's death, as she still wore the habit of mourning.

"I have worn it for half the period of your absence," she replied; "and I will continue to wear it until, if it please God, 'the days of my mourning shall be ended.'"

Thus indefinitely did she speak of the future, and De Montmorency felt the constancy and tenderness implied in her words. He gazed for a few moments, fixedly, on the scene before him—as one of old on the promised land he was not to enter—and then sadly, but with a heart sustained and strengthened, bade her farewell. Descending the hill, he was soon out of sight, and Agatha, too, sped homewards; her sense of liberty a little clouded at this moment, as we cannot help thinking. But happy, yea, blessed like her, are those who so take to themselves the severity of their earthly lot, the adverse circumstance, whatever it may be, that, when their chains are bid

to fall off, they make ready to bind on their sandals afresh, and to follow the angel of the Lord whithersoever he may lead,—

“ O’er moor and fen, o’er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone.”



CHAPTER XXII.

GOOD AND EVIL FRUIT.

" While yet a child, and long before his time,
He had perceived the presence and the power
Of greatness ; and deep feelings had impressed
Great objects on his mind, with portraiture
And colour so distinct, that on his mind
They lay like substances, and almost seemed
To haunt the bodily sense."

WORDSWORTH.



PIERRE was in his accustomed seat, on the spot which Agatha and her lover had but lately quitted. He had become very thoughtful of late. The future lay before him much as the landscape did that was stretched at his feet. He was dreaming of its probabilities and lost in reflection, of that kind which is akin to slumber, soft, soothing, and so light that it is scarce to be called thought, when the heat of the sun reminded him to seek some more sheltered place within the ruined walls. He sat down near what had been either a well, or a deep descent of more ominous import, some *oubliette*, or pass, to the land of forgetfulness, but which for ages had been covered in ; and, lest any unwary foot should tread the decaying planks, a large thorn-bush had been planted over it, more

effectually to guard the perilous aperture. It served as a shade to intercept the rays of light, as they fell upon the brick wall before which Pierre sat. The mystery of the hidden depth close at hand had often troubled his imaginative mind. It did so more especially at this moment, when the tales that he had heard of days of yore chimed in with the reverie of coming manhood :—

“ A gentle knight
Right, faithful, true—in deed and word,”

such as he was to the eye of the poet, when

“ pricking on the plain,”

appeared to him, but in the guise suited to his train of thought—a captive, pale and languishing, his soul fettered as his body was.

“ He was once free as I am,” fancied Pierre. “ He once fought and conquered. But now he thinks only of his lady love, and that he shall never see her more.”

So the story said, and he liked him the better for it.

“ They have taken away his sword! What is a soldier without his sword?” Papa never had his sword taken from him. Should I not have hated the man that took his sword away?” I would have killed him if I could. Yes, he would have been my enemy.”

And then Pierre thought of the enemy within his father had once talked to him about; and the sight of angry men came with it, as it might be, in that very spot, and they were forcing the gentle knight to descend that ugly pass—

He sat upright and shuddered at the thought.

A step came round the wall on the other side, and then a well-known voice said :—

“ What, dreaming again, master Pierre ? I thought I should find you here.”

It was François on his way to the valley.

Pierre started, like one who is only half awake.

“ I don't know what you mean by dreaming, François.”

“ Why, nodding as father does over the fire, and then saying he has not slept. I have been dreaming of turning shepherd, and to no purpose either, and you are dreaming of being a great general.”

“ No I am not,” said Pierre quietly.

“ Then you have changed your mind, as I have.”

“ How often have you changed your mind, François ?”

“ Oh, many a time. There is no good in holding to one thing if the thing is not worth having.”

“ I have been thinking,” replied Pierre, “ how much better the world would be if there was no fighting.”

“ Well, I was for saying, just now, I'd be a soldier, as you would be.”

“ And a good thing too, François, if you can do nothing better.”

“ A good thing or a bad thing, I don't know which. A fellow may be stuck up to be shot at, and first a leg goes off, and then an arm flies away ; or perhaps his head is knocked clean off ! he would say then, if he could, how much better it would have been if I had had nothing to do with fighting.” And Fran-

çois laughed. But Pierre was in no laughing mood.

"I wish you would be a little serious," he said.

"It is not in my nature, master Pierre. How can a man make himself what he is not?"

"Have you ever tried, François?"

"I should be clever if I succeeded, if I did try."

"We must take a great deal of pains about a thing if we wish to succeed," replied Pierre gravely.

"Like the King of France, who took to pulling down the rock behind our castle, once upon a time."

"Ah, tell me the story."

"It is no story. The king was more obstinate than the count who held the castle in those days, and as he had no gunpowder to blast the rock with, as we have to use in our mines, he began pulling it down with a pickaxe. You may see the blocks piled up there now."

"It must have taken a long time to do in that manner."

"The count soon gave in, you may be sure, when he found the rock falling about his ears."

"I wish you had a bit of such obstinacy, François."

"Why, I am not for pulling rocks and castles to pieces."

"No, indeed," Pierre might have said, but he only seemed to think it was of no use arguing.

"Are you going to the valley?" he asked.

"When you have told me something of what has happened in the valley since I left it. I should seem as if I had but just come out of Noah's ark, if I could

only say, 'How are you, neighbour?' Thank Heaven we are not drowned!"

"That you can say indeed, as your house was without a roof."

"I am glad I have not to thank his honour for the mending of it. He may say now I am no better than vermin, if he pleases."

"You should not be so hard upon him, François, he is unhappy enough without your scorn."

"He deserves to be so. There is many a one he has made unhappy."

"He must be very miserable, if that be true."

"He is the most miserable man in our village, it is my belief."

"Then I am glad he is going to leave it," said Pierre; "for I think he will be happier somewhere else."

"Is he going to leave La Roche?" And François threw his cap in the air. "Etienne will be glad to hear it. What other news, Sir?"

"There is to be a reaping match in the valley. Do you feel inclined to assist at it?"

"Is there to be a good supper?" he said slyly.

"As good as can be, I suppose, when things are so scarce."

"Well, that makes a difference. But you see I am kept so short upon the hills that I have not a mind to work if I am not to eat. Give me such a one as we had the night of the fire."

And he described the supper in the cave.

"François, you are like the man in the parable, who, after he had borne the burden and heat of the

day, grumbled, because he only received a penny. You should not think so much about the reward."

"Should I not? And who does not think of it, I should like to know?"

"There are so many things that I should like to do," said Pierre thoughtfully, and without answering the question, "that sometimes I do not know which to choose; but I take one to pieces in my own mind, and then I try to put it together again; that is, I cut it and carve it as your sister Elise cuts out with her long scissors. It is not every piece that fits, but the pleasure is to make it fit: so I square one part, and round another, and knock them all together, and then I know which thing I can do the best."

"If you have been thinking so long about it, you must know by this time which that thing is."

"But all my pieces do not fit yet. I must learn the use of my tongue, like you, François."

"Ah, I see. You had better practise upon me. Now is the time."

"Then I say, François, go to the reaping match."

"And wherefore? Give me your reasons."

"Whoever reaps the fastest and the best wins the prize."

"Whoever reaps the fastest!—That might do for me. But whoever reaps the best!—No, no! You must take your sermons somewhere else."

"My first sermon shall be upon poor Antoine," said Pierre.

"Is he dead?" enquired François, with some anxiety.

"So your mother told me."

"Now that has given me more pain than anything I ever heard in my life before."

"He was one of my people, François, that will be most thought of when they are gone."

"Why, you see, his was such a same, every-day sort of a life, that what could you think of him when he was living? His piece-work was so well put together, and, if he could have talked about it, he had not time to waste a word upon anybody."

"And yet you liked him."

"He was the best fellow I ever knew. If his words were few, he never said an unkind one. We shall not know the village without him."

"I hope you will say the same of me when I leave La Roche."

"You have not been a day-labourer amongst us as he was. We have not seen you go by our windows, week after week, and year after year."

"But I will go to some place where I can work for people and do them good, and they will love me as you loved Antoine."

"Perhaps it may be so. But Albert Duclos never loved Antoine, though he worked so hard for him. And his honour never liked Etienne, though he was his servant for many a year."

"I see you are right, François."

"Yes, for once you are right, François," he said, chuckling to himself; "you may toil as hard as you will, and say thank you to yourself afterwards."

"But I should like to think I had done something worth the doing, too," added Pierre, "if it were only a little like poor Antoine."

The reaping match took place, but François was not among the reapers. He neither worked nor ate. The men and women toiled each in their allotted space; and Le Jeune, true to his motto, led the band. Lisette, too, encouraged by her small experience in the labour of life, was incessant in her endeavours to prepare a hospitable board.

They come, a joyous set, the winner foremost of the rest, with ribbons streaming from his brown cap or berret; and songs and lighthearted merriment making him doubly glad of the honour of the day.

They sit down to supper. But what makes one start aside, and then another? What, when healths are drunk, restrains their loud applause? Does a spectre sit beside them? Why do the women look askance? Grandchamps is standing there in the open doorway to eye the feast. He has received the tribute of cold servility due to the father of their host. But where is his honour? Has he a right to the title any longer? He hates the sight of so much happiness. He will stand there to mar it if he can: for who dares to be happy in that company if he is not happy?

He stands there so long, that Le Jeune begins to perceive the gloom, and rallies first one and then another. Jeanne Bellecour, she who has a word for every one, why is she silent? Has the labour of the day been too much for her? She is not overdone with toil though she was first and last in the field. She worked, and looked for nothing for the reward. But compassion makes her mute; she cannot utter a syllable. And Joseph, the hero of the day! What is honour without the wholesome pride that honour

brings, the pleasure and satisfaction, the imparting of its abundant contentment, to those who have less or none? Joseph essayed a reply; he proffered a song: but the notes came forth slowly and unwillingly. He pleaded fatigue, and another took up the lingering air; and, more glad or less tired, poured out his lay in true mountain cadence, till the room was filled with his song. It was too much for the once proud dictator. If he had music in his soul, he had a sterner passion which was not in harmony with its touching strains. He went out. "What do I here any longer?"

He wandered to the forest-glade, outside the farm-gate. The moon was shining through the long arms of the oak and beech, interlacing themselves over his head, as it does when, without the shadow of a cloud, it looks cold and senseless to man's wrongs. Its pale beams seemed to haunt him. He wandered on. The swine had been driven home. There was not even one of those erring creatures to cross his path. He was alone: yes! more alone than ever in his mountain fastness he had desired to be. Nature, kind nurse and solace to the good man's soul, had no balm for him. Yet wherefore did he flee from his fellow-man, as though a lion were in his path? He did not love him, nor was loved by him. He kept walking on. There was nothing to thwart him. The narrow winding paths were still visible in the moonlight; the thickset leaves of the beech rustled in the passing breeze. He went in, and out, and round about again; his head erect, his foot never stumbling over the knotty roots that spread themselves everywhere.

Oh ! could he have rid himself of that aching void within ! he who felt himself nothing, could he have been nothing, what happiness for him !

He thought of the days that were gone. They came in array before him, pale and ghostlike,

“ The spirit walks of ev’ry day deceased.”

But what was there in memory to cheer him ? There was the confidence his lord had reposed in him. But where was it now ? There was the power he had exercised by right of that confidence. But it was no more. There was the home he had made for himself. But it was gone. Who was there that he had benefited ? These were so few in number that he did not reckon them ; perhaps he scarce thought of them at all. But one being came to his mind before all others, his daughter. If he had no room in his heart for any beside, he had a place for her.

“ I once hoped she would be proud of the memory of her father. I once hoped to leave her rich and independent, to live in the old house when I was gone. But now she must share my poverty. I am too old to work. If I had not taken my sister’s son to be my son, what would become of us now ? ”

It was the deed in his life that savoured least of self. He felt the consolation of it.

A light step came behind him, and at an opportune moment.

“ Dear father, what ails you ? ” a sweet voice said in a caressing tone. “ The night wind blows cold from off the mountains, and my mother waits for you. Our guests are gone.”

"Then let us hasten home," he replied. "I was thinking of going to St. Jacques."

"And why not stay with us, father?"

"I cannot live in the valley. I miss my old haunts and the mountain top. And besides," he added, "you do not want me, your people are not my people. Let me go where I can see new faces, or none at all, if I please."

"You will not find solitude in St. Jacques, father."

"And why not, child? It is but good morrow, neighbour, and shut the door. I am not at leisure to-day. And who shall gainsay me? But here they say, 'There goes his honour, poor man!'"

"They are very sorry for you."

"I do not want their pity."

"But would you have them rejoice over your misfortune?"

"They do so in their hearts, Lily."

"Oh, father, I do not think so ill of human nature as you do!"

"You have to learn it," he replied. "Who learns it so well as the man who has fallen?"

"I have learned a great deal since I have laboured amongst these poor people. I know who will give the helping hand and who will not."

"Time was you never needed it."

"Let us forget 'time was,'" she replied. "I am very thankful for the help of the kind-hearted. And I never should have known it, if I had not known the need of it. I mean if we had been always rich as we were once."

"Ah!" ejaculated her father.

"Do not be so miserable," returned Lisette. "It is not so sad to be poor as you imagine."

"You are young, child."

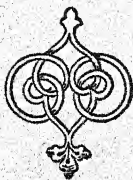
"But not too young to judge of the difference between being rich and being poor. Gaston and I were saying we were never so happy in our lives before."

"I am glad of it; I am glad of it," replied Grand-champs hastily.

They were passing the hen-house as he spoke. A great commotion was taking place there.

"What can be the matter?" said Lisette. "The fowls have been gone to roost this hour or more. The cock, who has given himself such airs of late, is holding it with a high hand over some brother of low degree, I suppose. There, now he has fairly tumbled him off the perch," she said, as she climbed up the step and looked within.

"Your cock of the roost must have the highest perch or none at all," said her father, as they turned to go away.



CHAPTER XXIII.

KEEPING THE FEAST.

"The greatest vicissitude of things amongst men, is the vicissitude of sects and religions: for these orbs rule in men's minds most. The true religion is built upon the rock; the rest are tossed upon the waves of time."—BACON'S ESSAYS.



ACCORDINGLY, Grandchamps went to St. Jacques. It was an irregular village on the outskirts of the hills, built on one side of a deep ravine, in which, as usual in that land of heights and depths, the river tumbled at the bottom; and it formed a kind of outpost to a more level country beyond, ere descending again to the plain, where towns and villages were more thickly congregated. Houses, dotted here and there, formed something like a street, and one of these Grandchamps chose, as most resembling his own, as it once was, in miniature. The remnant of the furniture that had escaped the fire was soon transferred to it, and he stood at Lisette's door prepared to depart.

"It will not be like going home any more," she thought, as she watched him standing there. "But you will come and see us, father, when you are tired of the solitude of St. Jacques."

"Ay, child, think of your old father, if he comes but seldom."

They embraced, and he left the valley.

The count easily acquiesced in this arrangement. The residence of his steward in La Roche did not seem to add to the happiness of the cottagers, and for this reason more than any other he had abstained from offering him any direct assistance in rebuilding his house. If, too, the count was about to become himself the dispenser of his bounties, and to take the stewardship into his own hands, so that the office became only a nominal one, it were better that Grandchamps should remove to a distance, when any occasion of dispute or rivalry could less frequently arise. In this respect the unjust steward had acted wisely.

The feast of their patron saint was celebrated by the inhabitants of St. Jacques with more than their accustomed hilarity. The storm that had descended on the valley with such overwhelming force had been more merciful to them ; and at break of day many a devout Catholic was wending his way to the little chapel of the Virgin, that half way down the side of the ravine displayed the emblem of peace, and by the tones of its musical bell, which the cross surmounted, called the faithful to return thanks to " Our Lady " for her protecting care during the late outbreak. Women with rosaries in their hands led their children to the sacred shrine, bidding them worship with holy fear and reverence in that benign presence ; and men and women having confessed and been absolved, returned, disburdened of their load, to the full enjoyment of the day's amusement.

And bent on pleasure, too, the villagers of La Roche might be seen, at a later hour, treading the

path of the muleteer, hastening over the dreary blank which marked the defile at its entrance ; and toiling up the steep ascent that led to St. Jacques, or sitting down to rest upon the loose pieces of rock that had fallen from the masses overhanging the road, and looking below upon a greener slope, which gave token of fertility and beauty about to appear when the head of the gorge should be attained. It seemed strange that people differing in creed, and dwelling in such close proximity, should live in amity one with another ; but the days when Huguenot and Catholic were at variance had long passed by ; the fires of animosity had burned low, and they wait a revival, if perhaps the spirit which animated the Christians of old once more stir them into a flame.

The parish priest of St. Jacques and the pastor of La Roche were both peaceably inclined. They received a stipend from the same government ; but Father Bonccœur, small as was his income, was rich by comparison, having only himself to care for besides his poor parishioners ; while Pastor Fidèle had a wife and four children to share his scanty means. Father Bonccœur had his housekeeper, his study, and his oratory, his *prie-dieu* chair, and his crucifix. Pastor Fidèle rocked the cradle, cut billets for the fire, and, in the long winter evenings, taught his children Latin, history, and geography, while his wife turned the spindle. Father Bonccœur could tell his people all they wished to know. He could talk with the miner of life beneath the surface of the earth, and with the tiller of the ground of all that concerned him below the vault of heaven. He had many a village tale, in the history

of the past, which would make his hearers' hearts thrill, interspersed, as it was, with wonders akin to the miraculous. And, on fête-days, who so happy as he who loved to see his people happy? In cases of sickness and death, who so ready with sympathy and the offices of the Church?

But what more of Pastor Fidèle? On days wet and dreary, when the sun shone or when it did not, on good and bad alike, he would travel afoot mile upon mile, his Bible in his hand, to visit the scattered ones of his flock, who would otherwise have been lost to his ministrations. No selfish consideration hindered him, no labour was too great to turn the wanderer into the right path. He had a pious and gentle soul, and he loved to bestow it in acts of kindness and "the charity that never faileth," if he could give nothing more.

Both Father Boncœur and Pastor Fidèle were men of a kindly nature; but with them our story has not much to do. They serve only to show how religious faith differed, even in these remote districts; and that it is for man everywhere to discern, according to his ability, between right and wrong; not to cavil, but to learn, "until the Lord come," who will set in order what is wanting, and make the true appear the better part.

In one thing their people were unanimous, that, on this day, they would devote themselves to pleasure. The green fields were filled with crowds. There was no need of chair or sofa; the turf was their resting-place, and oaks of a hundred years, and Spanish chesnuts, with their broad, bright green leaves,

though something robbed of their lustre, supplied shade enough for dancers and lovers and gamesters, for buyers and sellers, eating cakes and sweetmeats, and drinking lemonade; celebrating their annual festival with a zest as great as if it occurred but once in their lives. And who was there present, and who was missing, of those we know, in this joyous company? The steward of La Roche shut himself so closely within doors that the count, who came over on business, could hardly gain admittance to him. Albert Duclos stayed at home, and passed a miserable day, because Rosetta remained in her stable also. He shunned the eye of man, like Grandchamps, for he feared his reproach. Agatha St. Eustace did not leave the castle. She must needs console her friend and little Roland, who, like the magnet to the pole, turned towards his mother. Old Bernard, Jeanne's husband, sat at his own door; infirmity, like the ice that encompasses a ship in an Arctic winter, kept him there. He would fain have accompanied his wife and Elise to the scene of revelry, but he submitted with a good grace, and pleased himself with the thought of their enjoyment. Pierre and his servant, with François, (the shepherd could not leave his flock,) formed a group amidst the gayest of the gay, for a very short period; the former were but lookers on, and the latter was soon lost in the whirl of dancers. Lisette and Gaston came late. Not that they were great folk, and cared nothing for the fun, but there was work to be done. Gaston must make debtor and creditor answer to one another. It is true he might leave the figs and grapes to ripen alone in

the sun for one day, but he had need of rest ; he must think, too, of what is wanting, and prepare for the next day's labour. Lisette was happy, for she had her husband all to herself. They would ride over, towards evening, and break in upon their father's solitary life, and find their mother tired of expecting them, and glad to see them again, whether late or early.

Elise and her mother were resting themselves after their long and fatiguing walk in the noontide sun. Elise sat a little apart from her mother, and François came and sat beside her.

"Did you tell me Etienne would be here to-day?" she said.

"I did so. But what we most expect does not always happen."

"You are a poor comforter, François."

"Truth is not always pleasant, my little sister. But to speak it more plainly, it was easy enough for Etienne to be coming over the hill to see you when he lived at the Bocage, but now he has something else to do."

"I do not know what you mean, François, if you think he has altogether forgotten me."

"No, no, I will allow he thinks of you sometimes. He sits upon a mossy stone, perhaps, and he thinks, 'When will there be an end of this?'"

"You are very provoking, François. I know Etienne better than you do. Have I not known him all the days of my life?"

"And is that a reason for caring so much about him? How many another you have known as long."

"It is a reason for not forgetting him."

"So you may say of Gaspard, or any one else."

"I have no fancy for him."

"Ah, now we have it," replied François, laughing.

"But what if you are mistaken in your fancy?"

"After your own argument, François, it is just one of the things that can be."

"I grant it. But is it not a very foolish fancy that can be so mistaken?"

"I am not so sure of that. We must think the thing we love a good thing. It is better to think well than ill of any one."

"And the sooner we are undeceived the better. Now, in my opinion, as a man may speak, Etienne loves you, and you love Etienne; but he loves his freedom more, and you are loth to give it him. You want to make him a caged bird. You had better give up the notion at once. What sort of a prisoner should I make, do you think?"

"Indeed, François, you would be a difficult bird to cage," said Elise, sorrowfully.

François replied with another jest, but Elise had no mind to answer him. She sat thinking of her absent lover till the tears rose in her eyes, for still Etienne came not.

"Let us go and drink the health of his honour, and a welcome to St. Jacques," said François good-naturedly, seeing her vexed.

They moved away to where refreshments could be procured, and Jeanne Bellecour found herself alone. She got up, and sauntered towards a group not far beyond. A woman, less jauntily dressed than the rest, at once addressed her.

"I am glad to see you, Jeanne. My husband was not ready to come."

"And mine could not come. We are both in the same plight."

"It is not often we can say that, Jeanne. You have mostly the forward stroke of me."

"Why should it be so, Marguerite?"

"I don't know, neighbour. But there's his honour now; what would you have him do? He can't help himself."

Jeanne was silent a moment. "I am not a ruler and a judge over other men's matters."

"I have heard tell the count will not give him any assistance," said Marguerite.

"He would give him the right hand, and lift him up, if he could. But Grandchamps has been the maker of his own fortune, and he would not have any one mend it but himself. There are some you cannot help."

"Do you say that of me or of his honour?"

"And there are some that do not like to be helped," continued Jeanne, without heeding the enquiry.

"Oh, that is Grandchamps."

"When will your daughter be married?" added Marguerite quickly, desiring to change the conversation.

"The time is not come yet."

"Will it ever come, Jeanne?"

"I cannot tell, neighbour. We must follow after Providence, not run before it. It is a good sign if Elise and Etienne are willing to wait, for it proves their love will endure in dark days as well as light. I waited long enough for Bernard; too long I thought

it. But when I sat by my own fire-side, I wondered I had ever thought the time long."

"Can you tell me anything of the Lady Agatha, Jeanne?"

"She is waiting, too, and with as bright an eye as ever she had. Some say De Montmorency has been seen hereabouts; but I do not believe it; for what should hinder him now from coming to the castle? And Elise tells me, if her mistress is graver than usual, it is because her friend is ill. She will never leave La Roche again, it is said."

"And what will become of the two pretty boys she brought with her?"

"Never fear, Marguerite; God will provide for them. The youngest, to look at, is just fit for His kingdom, and the eldest, to do battle for it here. He is the 'bonniest sprig,' as his servant calls him, you ever gathered in spring-time. I don't right know the meaning of the word, but it means brave and beautiful, I suppose."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DAY THAT COMES NOT TO ALL ALIKE.

"Ha, ha! what a fool Honesty is! and Trust, his sworn brother, a very simple gentleman! I have sold all my trumpery; not a counterfeit stone, not a riband, glass, pomander, brooch, table-book, ballad, knife, tape, glove, shoe-tye, bracelet, horn-ring, to keep my pack from fasting; they throng who should buy first; as if my trinkets had been hallowed, and brought a benediction to the buyer: by which means, I saw whose purse was best in picture; and what I saw, to my good use, I remembered."

WINTER'S TALE.



THE two women were interrupted in their talk by the arrival of a merchant-pedlar, who, striking his cymbals, brought many a loiterer after him, to see the contents of his bundle, if not to purchase them. He came near to where Jeanne and Marguerite stood, offering chaplets and rosaries for sale.

"You have brought your wares to the wrong market," said Jeanne, as he presented one to her.

"I have wares for all markets," he replied quickly, putting down one thing, and taking up another.

"Here are handkerchiefs, silks, ribbons: now, I warrant you, you never saw a prettier one than that."

He held a handkerchief in his hand, in which chocolate colour with blue and yellow was happily

blended; and, extending it towards Marguerite, strove all his arts to tempt her to begin the bargain. But though it was the thing she most desired, she had not the requisite means to make it her own. Not even Lisette's wedding had procured for her the becoming headdress she had promised herself.

The merchant looked disappointed.

"If you come from La Roche," he said, "you must needs want something out of my pack. It is not often that misfortune does me a good turn, bad luck is the ruin of me. But since Antoine, the muleteer, died"—

"We have had no silver to buy," interrupted Jeanne; "nothing to send to market, and nothing to receive, for the wind and the rain have stripped us of everything."

"Ah, there it is again," he said.

"You had better seek some one more fortunate," added Jeanne.

"Why now, neighbour," said Marguerite, pulling her aside, "that is just the thing for Elise when she weds Etienne."

"When she does, Marguerite; but the time is afar off, as well as I can see."

"'Tis a pity, surely."

"Nay, nay; never fetter another's will. If he cannot do it for himself, who can do it for him? Let him alone. He will come down when he has soared far enough."

The merchant noticed the little side-play that was going on; he divined the reason of it, and, acting his part accordingly, he offered the handkerchief to a

pretty village maiden, who was eyeing it with covetous glances.

"You do not want it, I know you don't," he said; "but the time is coming when you will want it, I know that just as well."

"You are a bad fortune-teller," she replied; "I do not want your goods."

"I said you did not want them. You would not tell me if you did. But what is the use of good looks if you do not make the most of them?"

"You are rude," said the maiden, turning away.

"You have not made up your mind to refuse it," he replied, following her. She turned again.

"What is the price?"

He named one.

"It is too much. It is not worth half as much."

"You can have this one for half the price," he said, offering her another.

"No, I will have the first, or none."

But Jeanne, beckoning the merchant, had recalled him to her. The handkerchief so much admired was sold.

"Here is your money," she said.

"You have a daughter," he replied; "it will become her well."

"My daughter is in no need of it. Take the handkerchief, Marguerite."

"Her daughter lives at the castle, good man," said Marguerite, thinking to enhance the kind gift by ennobling the donor in the merchant's eyes.

"Will she say a good word for the poor merchant?" he humbly asked.

"They have no thought to bestow on such vanities," replied Jeanne. "There is sickness and sorrow there."

"There is bad luck everywhere," said the pedlar, sighing.

"There is misfortune everywhere," she answered.

"But thank you a thousand times," he concluded.

"Your daughter will, perhaps, have a trifle to spend when I call at the Chateau of La Roche."

He moved on without a rival in the crowd of villagers, but poor in his own estimation, though rich in theirs. In the meantime, Grandchamps sat alone in his lonely chamber.

"Does he think to make me a pensioner upon his bounty?" he half exclaimed, as the count left his door. "'Can I do anything for you, Grandchamps?' 'Give me back the authority you have taken from me.' Do I want his gold? I once had it, to do what I pleased with it. I did not want it for myself, nor do I now. I have enough for a poor man. Yes, poor! What is it to be poor? Is it to have nothing? No! It is, not to have enough to say to the poor man, 'Go thy way; eat, drink, and be thankful.' There is more in this money than we think of. What was I once? Did I dig the copper from the mine? Can I do it again? No! not if I could dig gold. Could I build with it again that which I have lost? Would it buy my honour back? No! Then I will not have it. 'Can I do anything for you, Grandchamps?' It was well to say so, perhaps. What have I done for him? I had a cottage and a field once; I bought them with my own earnings. My field yielded twice what my

neighbour's field did ; my cattle were worth as much again as his. Did he say, ' Come, do the same for me.' I have done it. Thy money did not perish in the using any more than mine. Take that thou hast, and go thy way."

Grandchamps sought his wife in the little parlour that now contained the few relics of their worldly grandeur.

" I expected they would have been here long ago," she said, in rather a petulant tone.

" Lisette is afraid of fatiguing herself, and will come when it is cooler," replied her husband.

" I wish I were nearer to her, Grandchamps. I cannot think what you find in St. Jacques to like so much."

" Would you have me go back to La Roche ?"

" Has the count offered to rebuild our house ?"

" No, wife, he has not."

" Then we cannot bring the old days back again."

" We could not if he did. Have I not told you so before ? I will resign my stewardship."

" What, Grandchamps !"

" What does the count say ? ' I am going to help the poor people of La Roche to rebuild their cottages. I am going to cut timber for them and hew stone.'"

" Perhaps he includes us amongst the number."

" Perhaps he does. ' Can I do anything for you, Grandchamps ? ' Verily I am poor, indeed !"

Their conversation was suddenly cut short by the arrival of Lisette and Gaston, in high spirits ; especially Lisette, whose cares sat lightly upon her, since she had learned better how to deal with them.

"Mother, mother, you look like yourself again, now you have all the old things about you. See! the old clock is telling tales of us as usual. It is an hour too fast, as it always was."

"Well, come at last, and welcome," she replied, cheering up at the sight of her child.

"And the windows are in their summer dress," continued Lisette gaily, "and flowers too! Yes, flowers from the Bocage, my pet flowers!"

"I saved that myrtle for you," replied her mother; "but it will not bloom here. We want the shelter of the hills."

"You want nothing but a little time to make you comfortable. And yet you look as if you had sat there, in your arm-chair, all your life."

"Time is a good mender to the young, but not to the old. I shall never feel at home here."

"No, it is not like home, but it will seem more home-like soon. And you will make it like home, mother," she added, kissing her.

"What have you been doing in the valley?" was the question in reply.

"I have been sitting under the chesnut-tree, finishing this shawl for you. You used to say, I could not knit; now see how clever I am become." And Lisette produced a shawl of exquisite workmanship, in the finest wool, such as are made, as an article of trade, by the peasant-women in the mountains, saying, as she unfolded it, "It has taken all my spare time."

"When could you have found time to knit this beautiful shawl?" said her mother, gazing at it with astonishment.

"I conjured it, you may be sure," she replied, laughing. "I have had hard work to get it done, nevertheless. And the fountain kept saying all the while, 'toil in vain, toil in vain.' It would have put me to sleep if it could. But here is the shawl."

"It is too good for me, Lisette. Time was when I should have been proud to wear it."

"And why not now, mother? Are you not his honour's wife?"

"Your father is going to resign his stewardship." Lisette turned very pale.

"I should not have told you so suddenly; but you know he has scarcely been steward, except in name, since we left the Bocage."

"You have told me so, but I could not believe it. I do not believe it now."

"It is true, nevertheless."

"He will change his mind, perhaps."

"He is a man as good as his word."

"But why should he do so, mother?"

"Your father tells me the count's mind is poisoned against him, and he thinks Etienne has done it."

"And why accuse poor Etienne?"

"Ah, you liked him, I know. He had a fair outside, but a deep heart within. He would do your bidding and say, 'What care I?' to himself, all the time."

"Perhaps he thought you did not care for him."

"What should I care for him, child?"

"He has served us for many years."

"And we have paid him good wages. But he owes us a grudge for Elise and her mother's sake, and the count has taken their part."

"Mother, I would wager a great deal he has not done as you say."

"It does not matter," she replied, "by this time to-morrow your father will be no longer steward."

"What will you do?" asked Lisette, mournfully.

"We will prove to every one we are not ruined. There are the lands of the Bocage; we must find some one to manage them for us, and for stock and farming implements, our savings will replace them."

"And you will live at St. Jacques?"

"Where else should we live, if your father is to be no longer steward?"

"I see it all," said Lisette, sadly again. "But when winter comes you will find it cold here, and you must live with us, like the myrtle, in the valley. I will have a *fête* on New Year's Eve, and bargain for better luck with the new year than we have had with this. A winding meeting! What say you to that, mother? We have a fine crop of flax, the best of the year."

"A pretty thought, indeed! A hundred windles turning in your long chamber!"

And the stately woman smiled, in spite of herself, at the idea of so much industry. It restored happiness, too, to Lisette's countenance. Meanwhile, Gaston and her father walked in the verandah, intently occupied with the ways and means of this inferior world.

But we have left Pierre and his servant wandering about all this time, and must go and look after them.

They watched the pedlar dispose of his wares by slow degrees, and amused themselves with the bois-

terous mirth of those who strove to outvie each other in the dance—the bachelor to win the kiss of the maiden of his choice; they followed upon the steps of Father Boncœur, and marked how the children dogged his heels, and caught at his hand, seeking the smile and the kind word, or the tale he could tell so well, as he moved hither and thither, his face as happy as any of the happy faces he saw around him.

“A kind man that,” said Davy, as they turned at last in a contrary direction. “He has a broad heart, and he gives the whole of what lies on the surface. Did you notice his laugh, how hearty it was, and the snatches of songs he gave, and the jokes he cut with one and another, and the pride the people take in him? They think him a marvellous being!”

“What do you mean, Davy?”

“Come this way, sir, we will look at the little chapel yonder.”

The door was open and they entered. It was always open, unless closed of necessity by stress of weather, that the solitary and afflicted might seek a refuge in the house of God. But on this day of rejoicing, there were no sorrowful or penitent ones within. Pierre and his servant walked slowly round its interior, and leisurely surveyed the humble adornments of this little chapel in the mountains. A series of rough paintings, representing various passages in the life of our Saviour, hung upon the walls. An oaken screen of rude workmanship, but curious from its antiquity, excluded the profane foot from the precincts of the altar. It was modestly arrayed, but in its best attire in honour of the saint who on this day

was commemorated, and decorated with flowers, the few that had reared their heads again after the storm that had swept them nearly all away.

They paused a moment, in the dim light cast from a window of ancient yet richly stained glass, until their eyes were attracted by a figure of the Virgin, in a niche outside the screen, dressed in full costume, and covered with amulets, testifying the gratitude of her worshippers for favours received; and, corresponding with it, on the other side, the picture of the patron saint of St. Jacques completed the furniture of the chapel, beside the few benches and chairs which stood in the centre of the building.

"I had rather look at this picture than anything else," said Davy, after scrutinising it very exactly. "It is a fine painting, though the worse for age, like most of us. Perhaps it has found its way here from Spain. The Spaniards think a great deal of the Apostle St. James. They believe that he planted Christianity amongst them."

"I remember Fernando had a picture of him in his hermitage," said Pierre. "He used to tell me a wonderful story, that I did not understand, about his body being conveyed in some impossible sort of way."

"From Jerusalem to Spain after his martyrdom. But I only know what the Bible tells me, that he suffered at Jerusalem; and if he had been translated thence, it would have told me that too. At least I am not called upon to believe the story if it does not."

"Does Father Boncœur believe it?"

"He would tell you he did, no doubt. It is a part of his faith."

"I do not like what I cannot understand, Davy."

"Nor I, sir; we none of us do. And there is enough in true religion hard to be understood. But these poor people, you see, are great believers in spirits, and such like; and they would think nothing of Father Boncœur without his faith, and his power they fancy to work miracles, as well as to talk about them."

"And what does he do?"

"You are too young to understand, and I am not wise enough to explain to you. It needs a power of words to say what he does or does not do. And there have been quarrels enough in my country, as I have told you before, about the matter. But do you see that little stone basin at the door full of water? Now when any of Father Boncœur's people come in or go out of this chapel, they sprinkle themselves with some, because he has blessed it, and it is called holy water. They say he has made it holy, and it will do them good. But there is a danger in resting in the outsides and shows of things. It is taking the husk and leaving the kernel. My fathers *died* for the faith. I must not forget that." And he looked once more earnestly at the picture. "It is something to *die* for the faith of Christ! The little plant of faith is, after all, the greatest miracle."

There was silence for a few moments, during which Pierre seemed musing fixedly upon some object, deep in his thoughts, as that which stirred the heart of the great apostle in centuries by-gone.

"Where do our wishes come from?" he said at last.

"That depends upon what our wishes are," replied his servant. "We may be discontented only."

"But I have a great wish, Davy."

"What is it, that you think so much about it?"

"I wish to be a missionary."

"Like Fernando, still."

"Yes, like Fernando."

"But what if it is only one of your dreams?"

"I do not think it would have lasted so long, if it were only a dream."

"You must begin to put your dream in practice. That will be the proof of it. Dreams have no reality. We wake and find it a dream."

"Then mine is not a dream," said Pierre, joyfully.

"Do you know that for many days and weeks past I have been to Pastor Fidèle to learn Latin and history?"

"You have kept it a great secret, if you have done so."

"Pastor Fidèle says I must go to some college, I forget where, to learn languages, more than he can teach me. That is the great difficulty."

"Do you mean the college, or the languages?"

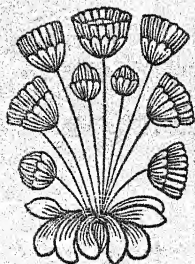
"Both, I think. For mama will not like me to leave her, and then it will be very difficult to speak in those out-of-the-way tongues like Fernando."

"He had the gift, and you have not, perhaps."

"But my wish will go before me, and help me on."

"Ah, truly," replied the man, astonished at the simple faith of the child. The wish and something more, both of nature and of grace, he thought to himself. "The victory that overcometh the world." What need of the picture before him, now? The living picture was there.

They heard a chorus of voices not far off. The peasants were singing their vesper hymn, as, the day declining, they returned homewards; and, casting one look around him, ere he stood outside the building, on the sloping ground—covered with shrubs and trees, which, stunted though they were, served as a wall above, to protect it from the violence of the wind, and which grew with more luxuriance to the edge of the foaming torrent in the depth beneath—the servant left the seclusion of the chapel, followed by his young master.



CHAPTER XXV.

THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER.

"Wait: my faith is large in Time,
And that which shapes it to some perfect end."

TENNYSON.



HE pedlar was as good as his word. He sought Elise at the castle-gate, on the first opportunity, after the fête of St. Jacques. But whether the porter had orders, as probably was the case, to discourage such people from presenting their wares for sale, or otherwise, he had some difficulty in obtaining admission, and appeared at last before Elise a little discomposed, and, to say the least, less replete with the oil of persuasion than on the day when he had asked leave of her mother to invade the exclusive dignity of her high abode.

Elise was busy with her "cutting out," for which Pierre had commended her, and did not like to be disturbed.

"What do you want, good man?" she said, in no very amiable manner. "We have enough of silks and cottons already, and have no need to add to the quantity. I am tired of mending and making as it is."

"It is well for our trade there is making as well as

mending," he replied. "Your mother gave me leave to call, and enquire if you had any wants that I could supply."

"Indeed! You make of your yard an ell, methinks. My mother knows I have no wants that are not well supplied."

"Oh, but a trifle or so; I did not speak of great things," he said, with returning suavity. "It is impossible that in this great house there should be no lack of something."

"You speak for yourself, I see, like most of your trade."

"Yes, I have something to say for myself as well as for you."

"We had better begin with number one."

"No, yourself first, if you please."

"I am not particular," returned Elise, who, like her brother, had a love of repartee. "But my time is precious, and there is nothing you can tell me of myself that I do not know already."

"Ah, now, that is a great mistake, for we sometimes do not know ourselves what all the world knows of us."

"If you have anything to say, you had better say it quickly," she answered, speaking rather hastily.

"I have only that to say which is in everybody's mouth, 'It is a pity the beau garçon Etienne should waste his time on the hills when he could do something better.'"

"It does not concern me what others say, or yourself either," she said, with some haughtiness, and wondering at the information he possessed.

"Pardon," he replied. "What the tongue lets fall it is for the merchant's ear to pick up. What would he be with only 'yes' and 'no' to give to his customers? And I will tell you something more you will like to know. The lands of the Bocage are to be let to the best bidder: what say you to Etienne being farmer on his own account?"

It was a tempting thought, and the pedlar perceived that he had planted his foot on the right spot.

"It is all in the way of business to say a word for any one when it is wanted," he added. Elise paused. She had not seen Etienne for many a long day; not since the destroying fire had freed him from his chain of servitude; and this was the cord, it seemed, ready to her hand, to fetch him to her side again. "My work," continued the pedlar, "is like that beautiful darn in your collar, a word here and a word there, one stitch taken up and another let down, but all in the regular way, as that is, no chance matter. Now if you would do me as pretty a piece of work as this," pointing to the specimen Elise had given of her talent in the mending line, "I would give you a collar, made for you, made for the express purpose of fitting the throat of Mademoiselle Elise Bellecour, to within a thread of the size it ought to be, and as pretty a one as you would wish to have."

He took from a box a lace collar with lappets, folded in the smallest possible compass, and made of Spanish lace that had been smuggled over the borders. Such a present implied a good deal to be done in return. But the crafty man gave the girl no time to consider, and, forcing it upon her acceptance ere

she was aware of the consequences, he said, "Now you will not tell the count or Lady Agatha St. Eustace of such a trifle, but you will say, perchance, what pretty things the merchant had, and how obliging he was, and how convenient it would be if he were to call sometimes; for that now there is no one to do an errand to St. Jacques, and it is so vexatious to be obliged to do without a thing when one wants it, or to send a messenger on purpose"—

"Oh, but I cannot say all that," said Elise, frightened, and giving back the collar.

"No, not all at once," replied the pedlar, putting her hand aside, "but by little and little, as I shall say, 'I hear the count wishes Etienne to have the farm at the Bocage;' and after a while again, 'the count is very anxious about it, and, indeed, the Lady Agatha thinks there could not be a fitter person;' and every one knows, if she wishes it, the thing is done."

Poor Elise! She could neither say, yea nor nay. What if Etienne should go back to his old master, and lose the happiness for which he had sacrificed so much? But she would leave the matter, she would not meddle with it.

"I cannot promise to do what you ask me," she said to the pedlar.

"I do not ask you to promise, you mistake me," replied the man full of guile, and leaving the seed to spring up where he had planted it, in full expectation that it would yield the fruit he desired. "I bid you good day."

And turning to retrace his steps, he directed them

towards Albert Duclos' cottage, bent upon accomplishing the scheme his wily soul had projected. But he found the old man in no very tractable mood. A messenger had just brought back Rosetta to her stable, but without the remuneration her services demanded.

"Is she yours, to do what you like with her?" he heard him saying, in the loud tone of voice he made use of when roused. "There, go fetch the meal for her supper! Why do you stand there, looking at me?"

The affrighted lad still held the bridle in his hand as the pedlar approached, not knowing what to do. But his appearance at once relieved him from his dilemma.

"I will give you what you ask for her," he chimed in at the lucky moment.

"Ay, so you may. And so shall every one who hires her," was the rough reply. But the prospect of a fresh bargain appeased the angry man, and the boy feeling himself released, dropped the rein, and Rosetta trotted to the well-known portal.

"I am for fair dealing," began the pedlar. "What is the world worth to any man, if the advantage is to be all on one side? I say what's the worth of a thing? and I'll give you the value of it."

"The worth of that beast to me cannot be told," replied Duclos, "and I will not part with her for any consideration."

"No, not sell her," said the man of business, "I am not prepared for that either. But make her over to me for so much. So much for my profit, so much for yours."

"What profit, man; and how much?" said Duclos, sternly.

The pedlar replied by motioning him towards the house; and beginning to undo his pack.

"Pshaw! I do not want your goods," said Duclos, and turning away.

"You do not want them, but you cannot do without them," he answered, with a cunning smile. "If you can't get your money now, what will you do when the corn is reaped and the harvest got home?"

The stern man began to relent, but he did not reply. He stood leaning on his stick.

"Now, here is an article," continued the pedlar, handling a piece of rich silk; "let me carry it where I will it will fetch its price. And stormy nights, dark nights, a run for it, a cut or two—what does it matter? Wool and tobacco are worth any risk."

"Ho Antoine!" exclaimed the unhappy father, as of old, and then relapsing into his sullen mood, as if touched by the remembrance of the loss he had sustained.

The pedlar, no doubt, perceived the cause of his emotion, for he forbore to press the bargain, while the lame man pondered it deeply for some minutes.

"You want my mule," he said, at length. "And how much will you give me if I let you have her for one month?"

"Half as much as she brings me," replied the pedlar.

"How many francs, I say?" repeated Duclos, in a louder tone.

"As many as you make by her, and as much again."

"I have made none to-day, and you mean to pay me after the same reckoning. You shall not have Rosetta."

But the pedlar being determined to obtain the use of the animal, one way or other, would not let so good an opportunity escape him without another effort.

"There is just this difference between us," he began again. "You stay at home, and I go abroad in the world. I learn what the world is. There is nothing to be had without risk, I tell you."

"Give me the money that chinks," replied the miserly man, "and you may keep that which you will never hear the sound of."

"And you shall have it," returned the other, "as I am the true-born son of a merchant pedlar, who never let his word go for nought. But wait a bit," he added, as if to make good his own bravado while opening a door of escape; "the ground may lie well for the sportsman, and yet he does not know the game that is upon it. I will see you again. And if not, you will know there is no truth in what I say."

Duclos was glad when he was gone, for he put no faith in him, nor in any man.

Meanwhile Pierre sat with his mother in the room facing the sunrising. He looked anxious, and graver than his years allowed. The thought of the future weighed heavily upon him, and he could not be happy until he had imparted something of its burden to her who must be the arbiter of his destiny. But her pale cheeks and languid limbs, as she reposed on the couch by the open window, made her

an object of pity even in his child's eye, and he feared, with the tenderness of brave souls that know how to estimate the pain they will not shrink from in their own persons, to break the repose she at that moment seemed to be enjoying. Yet the stillness of the room, situated as it was at one end of the huge pile, suffered all his most cherished hopes to steal upon him, and, brightened by the early sun, it invested them with a cheerfulness and reality which encouraged him to proceed.

"Mother, we have been here a long time," he ventured to say, "but it does not seem so."

"There has been so little to mark the days," she replied, with an effort, "except while the storm raged. And we counted them slowly then."

"They were like those days when papa used to go away from us, and that long last day, which was the longest of all. I remember Davy telling me to take my book and read; but the words seemed all joined together in a string, as if they had no meaning. A whole page was like one sentence, and I turned over into the next page, but it was just the same. I could not tell what had gone before, and I did not understand what came after. Mother, I like a day when I know what I have been about in it," he added, seeing her features lengthen at the sudden recall to past times.

"What have you been about lately, Pierre? Has Davy set you a task, as he used to do?"

"I have been thinking," replied the boy, and parrying the question.

"But thinking without doing, Pierre!"

"I fancy I do so much when I am thinking, mother. I travel so far, and see so many people, and learn so many things; and when I get back again, perhaps, I have been only for half a minute away. I wish it did not take longer to do in reality than it does to think."

"Life would be long, indeed, at that rate. But we must be content with the little we are permitted to do."

"I suppose it all seems little in the end," replied Pierre, "but it seems great and difficult when we begin."

"You talk as if you had some scheme in hand. What is it?"

Pierre came nearer to his mother, and threw his arms round her neck. "I do not like to tell you," he said, kissing her.

"Some wild scheme, no doubt," she replied, seeing with surprise his countenance irradiated by some glowing thought. "You know, Pierre, you must follow in your father's footsteps. How are we to win back all we have lost but by service done?"

"Papa has given his life for it; is not that enough?" returned the boy, proudly.

"But the emperor thinks most of the man who holds the sabre in his hand."

"I do not love him for it," he said, the bright look vanishing as he spoke.

"The war makes life precious, my boy."

"We have something better to do than to fight, mother."

"But war makes peace. Let us hope it will do so, though it has been long in coming."

"Mother, I learnt in my Bible lesson one day, 'Blessed are they that give up houses and lands for Christ's sake.'"

"But are you called to do so, Pierre? Am I to give them up and Roland too?"

The boy was silent. A great conflict was evidently going on within him, but his love for his mother prevailed. He saw the conversation agitated her, and Roland coming in at the moment, he left the room.

But though he gave up the subject openly, he did not give up the thought of it. Reading became once more to him what it had been when the substance confounded itself with the shadow, the meaning with the type that translated it; and not until he had talked the matter over with Pastor Fidèle, who explained to him, in another but as simple a manner as his servant Davy had done, that "we are labourers together with God, God's husbandry and God's building," could he be convinced, that, though his hopes were dashed for the present, his labour was not in vain.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PITCHER BROKEN AT THE FOUNTAIN.

“ On se corrige quelquefois mieux par la vue du mal que par l'exemple du bien ; et il est bon de s'accoutumer à profiter du mal, puisqu'il est si ordinaire, au lieu que le bien est si rare.”

LES PENSÉES DE PASCAL.



ND Elise was not happy ; her conscience was ill at ease.

“ O, 'tis a tender place——”

as one has said who was well skilled in the science of human nature. The bribe she had accepted ! What would her mother say ? And yet her heart beat quick at the notion the pedlar had so craftily suggested to her. What if François were right, and Etienne did not care for her ; or did he think she cared nothing for him ? Why had he not come to St. Jacques ? The token he had sent her, was it to say farewell only ? Would not this be the test to prove his affection as well as hers ? Her manner was so abstracted that it could not escape the observation of her kind, but discerning, mistress.

“ You have not been like yourself since the feast of St. Jacques,” she said, seeing her downcast look. And, speaking experimentally, she added, “ Pleasure has its pain.”

Elise answered by bursting into tears.

"You are anxious about the future, no doubt," continued Agatha, when she had become more composed; "but delay is safe in the hand of Providence. We must not wait to do, too oft, but God may."

There was something in the words that struck Elise as applicable to what was in her heart, though the facts were not exactly as Agatha supposed.

"I do not mind to wait, while Etienne is content," she replied.

"And is he not so?"

"While he knows of nothing better to do, I suppose."

"Do you know of anything that would suit him better than his present occupation?"

Elise was silent. To answer the question would be to enter upon the whole difficulty.

"I heard to-day that the lands of the Bocage were on hire," she said, timidly.

"Who told you so?"

"A man who came with news to sell as well as wares."

"Did you buy the tidings of him?"

Elise confessed she had not bought anything.

"Then he must have had a bad bargain."

Elise thought upon the collar. Now was the time to plead the pedlar's cause, but she let it pass.

"Do you think that Etienne would be happy if he had the lands of the Bocage?"

Elise answered evasively, "I have not asked him."

"You have only asked yourself the question. You wish it for your own sake."

Elise acknowledged that it was so.

"And in all probability Etienne would not desire to stand in the same relation to Grandchamps as he did before."

"He would not be his servant."

"He would be in a less menial condition, but accountable to him."

Elise remembered her first impressions when the subject was presented to her. She wondered, she said, that she had ever thought about it.

"You did not put away the wish at once, and therefore it has gained credit with you. But what has become of Etienne, since you have thought only of Elise Bellecour?"

The tears stood again in her eyes at this rebuke. Agatha looked at her with deep concern. Their heart-strings were tied much after the same fashion, and she felt them tug and strain within herself, as she perceived, in one younger and less able to endure, they gave way.

"Indeed, we cannot part with you at present," she said, kindly, seeing the effect her words had produced. "And, for your comfort, I do not think Grandchamps would accept Etienne's services if they were offered. He has resigned his stewardship."

Elise was about to withdraw on hearing this, surprised at the intelligence which would at once have decided her rejection of the pedlar's proposal, since the steward's interest with the castle was severed, had she known it, and still more vexed with herself for what she had done. But Agatha bid her stay.

"I wish you could persuade Roland to leave his

mother sometimes," she said. "It will be hard for him to part from her when the moment of separation comes, as come it will, I fear. You must win the little fellow by slow degrees. It will be a work of patience, I know, but it will fall in well with the lesson of patience you have to learn for the future."

Elise expressed her acquiescence in a few words humbly spoken, and left the room. But the task she had been set would have been no easy one, as Agatha foresaw, had not circumstances aided her in fulfilling it.

The count, bent upon doing good to all, did not forget even the miser and his hoard; and whenever Rosetta was disengaged, he hired her for the use of Roland, who was only too happy to be reminded, in this way, of the days when he journeyed with his brother to La Roche in the same primitive style. Thus the pedlar's schemes to possess himself of the mule were, for the present, frustrated. Roland was pleased when Pierre joined the little cavalcade, as he often did, and when he called him his "lily of the valley," for he was quite as pale as one of them, and told him to get roses, and make the most of the sunshine, for the storm would come again, Roland would say, smiling and unlike himself, "I do not think it will come again, brother; we have had no storms of late." And so, followed by Davy, he jogged over hill and dale, and forgot the grim castle and all its terrors, which the wild winds had aggravated, and even, for a while, his mother and her sick room.

At first, his impulse was always to seek her, to impart, as children love to do, the pleasure he had derived

from these long rambles. But, by degrees, he yielded to the persuasion of Elise to bestow his extra-animation upon herself; and she, to secure him more certainly from breaking in upon his mother's repose, would tempt him in various ways with mountain strawberries gathered in the woods overhanging the stream—a part of her morning labours for his sake—and cream, a luxury not often allowed in the days of cheesemaking; with stories, too, and legends, in return for his communications, and with devices and puzzles, which were quite in accordance with her talent for dissecting silk and muslin. Things went on for some time in this manner. One day Elise was persuaded to mount Rosetta herself, and, escorted by Roland, to be the bearer of the coin the master loved so well. Without it she would have been afraid to meet him; but with such a passport, and being Jeanne Bellecour's daughter, she essayed to gratify the child's curiosity by showing him Rosetta's habitation.

As she dismounted at the gate, Duclos looked at her and at Roland with a good deal of surprise, but his countenance relaxed as he called to mind from whence they came. He advanced towards them with great subserviency, and was about to retire in charge of the mule, when Elise addressed him.

"Will you let my little companion lead Rosetta to the stable?"

"Ay, sure," replied Duclos, looking at the child and then at her. "You are Elise Bellecour."

"Yes."

"And this the child of the sick lady?"

"Hush," said Elise, softly.

Duclos looked again at Roland, as his pale countenance became still paler on hearing these words.

"Shall we give Rosetta her supper?" he said as he led the way. And bringing out a bucket, he mixed some meal with water, as food and drink for the weary beast.

Roland helped to hold the bucket, while he watched with interest the agreeable process.

"She has earned her supper to-night," he said. "It is well for me when she does so."

Elise recollected the money she had brought. He took it, and chuckled as he did so.

"You must miss your poor boy, Duclos. His regular earnings were better than this chance-work."

"It is a weary day that brings nothing," he replied.

"Could you not find another mule-driver? We have errands to St. Jacques continually."

"Yes, but I could not find another Antoine."

Elise wondered to hear him speak so.

"He was as good a boy as ever lived," she remarked.

"It was just this. He never wronged me of a penny."

"Are there not others of whom you could say as much?"

"The world is full of dishonesty," he answered.

Elise thought upon the pedlar, and the lace which still remained in her unwilling possession.

"Did you see the merchant who was this way not long ago?"

Duclos implied, by a grunt, that he had seen him.

"Will he come again, think you?"

"He will come for money's worth, when he thinks he can get it," he said, with a cunning look. "But I'll not give it him."

"What do you mean, Duclos?"

"It is his trade," he replied, with a still deeper look.

Elise partly understood, from her own experience, what he meant.

"What is money for, if it does not buy bread? What is money worth, if it is not here?" he added, slapping his pocket vehemently.

Roland was frightened at the man's earnestness, and Elise had never heard him say so many words before.

"But find another master for Rosetta, to do our errands to St. Jacques," she petitioned.

"Not while she has so good a one," he replied, looking at Roland.

Elise looked too. There was a likeness to poor Antoine. Perhaps the father perceived it.

"He will not be long here, Duclos; you must soon find her another."

"Let him have her as long as he is here. He will give me her day's wages," he replied, and turning away.

"Have you seen my mother lately?" said Elise, as a last question, and hoping to hear tidings of her parents.

"No!" was the surly answer, and he made as if to leave her. There was one subject on which

Duclos would not accept of sympathy. Elise knew this, and that her mother's name reminded him of it. Perhaps she had already approached the unwelcome topic too nearly. She turned to look back as he hobbled into the porch.

"He will count his gains there, and reckon Antoine's worth by them," she said to herself, "but he will never learn his true value."

"What made the man so angry?" asked little Roland as they walked homewards. "He might have thanked us, at least, for the money."

"He thinks he has a right to it, and that there is no necessity to be grateful," replied Elise.

And she fell into a reverie, which was only broken by the child's prattle, as they went along.

"I see my mother's window open still. I will go in and wish her good-night."

"But do not stay long, Roland. She will be tired, and it is late."

"No, only to tell her that Duclos will let me have Rosetta as long as I like," he replied, as he mounted the stone staircase in the turret, that led to the eastern end of the castle.

Agatha and Anna had been sitting together, as was their wont, when the fine evenings of summer, now approaching towards its end, tempted the rest into the open air, and left them to undisturbed intercourse. How soothing is such friendship to the weary and heavy-laden! And Anna felt it so, if we may judge by the tone of her conversation.

"I remember the day when we first sat together in this room. How still and silent your heart seemed, compared to mine!"

"And now, perhaps, it is the reverse," Agatha replied. "Events stir us. We rouse ourselves up for the occasion, and are not so soon at rest again."

"Mine had been a rough life," said Anna, still looking to the past, "and I had just passed through the roughest passage of it."

"It was like the almost overwhelming wave that lands the sailor half dead upon the sea-shore."

"Yes. But I never thought to know such peace as I do now."

Agatha sighed. Why did she sigh? Had her own bark put to sea again? No! But there is a floodgate to our affections, which, in her late encounter, had been well nigh burst open, spite of all philosophy.

"I have been ashamed of my own sorrow, in the presence of yours," continued Anna, seeing the shadow of a cloud overspread her countenance, which had been so clear and bright before. "Though you acknowledge none, there is a depth in your heart that I cannot fathom."

"There is a dark spot in all our hearts that God only knows, depend upon it."

"But you have shared my troubles, and I have nothing to give in return."

"I cannot turn my heart inside out, to show you."

"As I have done."

"No! There are some whom God holds up to the eyes of the world, as the martyrs of old, a spectacle to angels and to men. And there are others whom He bids accomplish His work in secret."

"True. And your sorrow may be harder to bear

than mine, since it is unrevealed ; while I have the sympathy of every one."

Agatha did not reply.

"Do you know," she said, "that Pierre has been a pupil of Pastor Fidèle for some time past?"

Anna expressed her surprise, but quietly, for she was exhausted with the effort of conversation.

"He wishes to be educated as a missionary."

She heard the word, and it flashed upon her what Pierre had said a few days before. She had not understood him then, but she did now.

"It will be hard to give him up," she said, slowly and thoughtfully.

"But if it is for his happiness?"

"I have had ambitious thoughts for him, I have hoped great things for myself, too, perhaps. But Agatha"—

And Anna stretched out her arms as if to embrace her friend.

"I have great peace here, which makes amends for all."

Agatha stooped down to receive the embrace.

"For all you have suffered," she said, kissing her.

"Yes, nothing but peace."

The folded arms dropped almost as she spoke. Was it a fainting fit that had overcome her? Roland came into the room at the same moment. Poor child! Agatha asked him to fetch Elise, not knowing what to say. But the truth was but too evident. He was an orphan indeed. How well was it then that he had some one to turn to in the place of his mother. Agatha had judged wisely both for him and

for Elise. If her love had formerly been selfish, in ceasing to dwell upon it during the endless "cutting and carving" that Pierre had talked about, it had become purer, more self-denying, more fit for the holy estate to which she looked forward. And she was full of the affection a woman's heart should possess, enough for all occasions and ready to the purpose, and she bestowed it freely upon the

"Poor orphan in the wide world scattered."

But since we give out of a full heart, no doubt the cup of blessing would have overflowed more readily, if she had been quite free from the pain to which the pedlar's crooked policy had subjected her.

"Roland wants all the comfort I have to give," she said to David one day, when they were conversing upon the subject of their mutual care.

"And you know how to give it," he interrupted her by saying, with his usual honesty, "I love the child as much as you do, and more, for I have cared for him all his life; but my love keeps within doors too much, it does not come abroad as yours does. How is it that we men are fastened up so tight we cannot get loose?"

"I suppose it is for the same reason that Roland cannot speak his grief. He is like a closed-up flower, that will not open to the sun any more."

"That is a bad sign," remarked Davy. "Too much like his mother, I fear. She never wore her grief outermost, as you may say."

Elise felt her own heart's bitterness too, and could not find words to reply.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MAKING HASTE TO GROW RICH.

"'Tis liberty alone that gives the flow'r
Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume,
And we are slaves without it."

COWPER.



HERE is a rough pass, which, like many others in this mountainous district, leads from the high ground on one side of the neutral line, separating the two countries, to that of its sister-land on the other. Large projecting blocks of stone are as steps in the rugged staircase climbing from one narrow ledge to the next, until it reaches a plateau, or more level extent of ground, where the traveller finds he has ascended to the clouds, and looks abroad upon hills tumbled in every shape together, the one on which he is resting being apparently only more odd-shaped than the rest. Again, the hills descend a little and again rise, so that the eye cannot see far beyond the limits of its more immediate ken. It was the close of day, and the mists were rolling about in every direction, concealing the pathway, and almost enveloping the passer-by in their mysterious folds.

"I will sit down and wait," said one to himself.

"If I have not the eye of an eagle, and I could not use it if I had, I have the ear of a roebuck, which will serve me as well. And I can think of what is before me, for I have not a clearer eye for the future than I have to pierce these woolly clouds that surround me on every side. If Duclos should refuse to lend me the mule? If I have not wherewith to pay him first? If that silly girl should refuse to do my errand? Pshaw! This pack is not worth a fight for it!" And he kicked the cumbrous load, more weighty than worthy of its weight. The pedlar, for it was he, sat musing on his ill-chance. "Now give me the mule, I would be an honest man at once. Ah, how bravely those troops of merchants go to and fro! Who knows what is hid amongst their heaps of baggage? So much in fair dealing, who doubts for the rest? And then such opportunities of learning the secrets of the trade. There is many an awkward corner they turn that I cannot get round. But let me see. What's in this pack? Two Spanish shawls—gay enough to tempt any woman. Carry them far enough they will double their value. But who is to find his way through these bye-paths in all this mist and devilry? Well! Two pounds of tobacco. That's not much. And for aught beside, I must go back the way I came, if I wish to cast my fate upon this venture. But stay! Two pounds of tobacco! It will do to tempt the old man perhaps. Two pounds! Why, 'tis too much. Throw two ounces at a thief, and say, that goes for nothing! 'Tis too much! But the mule. If I have but luck for a single hour, I shall be across the frontier."

And the pedlar got up and began to grope his way, as well as his memory served him, in the dangerous locality. He followed the course of a river, which flowed noisily on, in the direction in which he desired to proceed. But gradually the sounds increased in violence, until he became aware that he was standing beside a fall of water of some feet in depth, and that the next step might send him he knew not whither, perhaps into some small lake fed by the stream above hid amongst these steep declivities, where the cares of the pedlar, alike with his mortal frame, would be as surely buried in its dark waters, as in the silent grave of earth, to which man's steps are ever tending. He paused again. But to stay there was impossible. The enemy he feared, too well acquainted, as he knew, with every awkward angle that perplexed the unwary contrabandier, might pounce upon him in a moment, and carry him off, like the eagle to his nest, an unhappy victim. He turned aside. The mist rolled away for an instant, and he shuddered when he barely distinguished the awful fate that had awaited him, though but for a moment. "Oh, to be an honest man! To be a merchant, if but with one beast's burden!" He struggled over a mass of rocks, slippery with the spray, but which led in a contrary direction. He had mistaken the path. Presently the rocks became dry, arid, and broken; and, from his knowledge of the country, he was satisfied, by the falls he experienced upon the sterile soil, during which he breathed many silent aspirations after a more settled line of life, that the difficult ground he was traversing would ere long conduct

him to a less hazardous tract, the intermediate space between it and the rugged pass which awaited his returning footsteps. He scrambled on therefore, and soon found himself in the beaten path.

It was through a small valley, enclosed by low mountains and unadorned by the hanging woods and green pastures, which, interspersed amongst the precipitous peaks to which he was approaching, gave them a winning look in spite of their severe aspect ; and invited the traveller towards the staircase of rock, descending into a valley larger and far more picturesque than the one he was leaving, since it was surrounded by these lofty and friendly embattlements. But however beautiful the scenery in advance of him, it could be of no avail to the pedlar at this moment, for the mist only grew thicker and thicker.

He would fain have sought shelter in the hospice or house of refuge for travellers and douaniers, which stood at the head of the pass. But what to do with the pack ? Should he throw it into the mass of waters, which, falling from a great height, went careering by the rocky pathway, down, down to the valley below ? That was not to be thought of, for he had passed, unnoticed, within a short distance of the house, and was now standing upon the ledge which rounded the first promontory in the awkward descent. Yet he stood shivering on the brink in the darkness, for though a man of large views, as he deemed himself, he was not possessed of much moral or physical courage. He determined at last to leave the unlucky pack, for a time, to its fate ; and casting it down in a corner more obscure than the rest, re-

solved to seek it at dawn of day, even though he kept awake all night for the purpose. With this determination he approached the house, endeavouring to appear as much at his ease as possible.

It was situated as in a basin, the rocks on one side and on the other sheltering it from the blasts of wind, which would otherwise have bid the traveller tarry neither for friend nor brother at a height so lofty and exposed. He entered that part of the house devoted to travellers, but cautiously, for fear of encountering, in the dark, some ill-disposed mule, or running athwart heaps of baggage or fuel, which occupied the lower part of the house. No unlucky obstacle, however, arrested his footsteps, and he stood at the bottom of the flight of steps, or ladder, leading to the floor above, listening to the sounds that proceeded from thence, and straining to catch a glimpse of the party assembled round the blazing logs of pine, which threw a flickering light upon the walls within.

"We have not met since the night of the big bonfire," said a voice that the pedlar did not recognise.

"No, we tread the same ground, but never the same track, it seems," answered another.

"Have you had good sport lately?" enquired the first speaker.

"Not so good as might be. The mists have lain heavy of late."

"It is always so at first. Never so good as we expect. There is too much blood about you. The hand is not steady, nor the eye clear enough. But cheer up, you are made of the right stuff. I am thinking of our supper in the cave. I wish we had as good a one to-night."

On hearing this the pedlar seemed to think there was no time to be lost, for he ascended the ladder, and appeared at the door of the room where the two men sat. A woman came forward, in the character of hostess, to know his errand.

It was soon told. A benighted traveller, bound from the sister country, a guide who had sought refuge, lest his own feet should be taken in the pitfall he had spent his life in directing others to avoid. A seat was placed for him beside the hearth. He came empty handed. He had nothing but the worth of a scanty meal to bestow. But he was soon asked to partake, and welcome, of the hunter's fare, and a bottle of the sour wine of the country rewarded them for their hospitality.

The pedlar thought himself in luck, no doubt, for he guessed into what company he had fallen, and determined to bait his line accordingly. The first comers were soon merry with their better cheer.

"A random shot that has done well," said the unpractised sportsman.

"One that succeeds sometimes against all reason and experience," returned the more knowing one.

"A bit of luck that comes to one blindfolded," chuckled the pedlar. "Now, for the like of you, I should say your whole life is luck or no luck."

"Nay, nay," hastily retorted the man whose sinewy frame and keen eye spoke of the training which had made him the accomplished follower of the chase he felt himself acknowledged to be. "You know better than that. You have not gone to and fro amongst these hills without learning what the chamois knows better than anybody, that Gaspard is a dead hand."

"We have not met before to-night," remarked the pedlar.

"That may be, but the hills and the mountains tell of Gaspard."

"I have heard your name mentioned, it is true," he replied, humbling to the pride of the renowned chasseur. "And yours too, perhaps," addressing his companion.

"Mine is Etienne, but unknown as yet."

"To the hills and the mountains, but not to me."

"Ha!"

"It is not long since I passed through La Roche."

"Your trade is to wander in the beaten path, but I have not been to the valley since the day that I left it for these hills."

"You have nothing to take you there," said the pedlar, joking apart.

"If a man would love his calling he should not follow it by halves," retorted Etienne.

"I will not contradict you, friend. I am all for profit and no loss, but there is a mighty difference in the way that people achieve this one time and another. Now for me it is a poor thing to wander to and fro as I do. I would gladly change my way of life."

"And what is your inclination for, may I ask?"

"Oh, I have my own views."

"And you have heard my name spoken?"

"As a man may hear a chance word at any time. I am but a bird of passage."

"You have heard of a man, too, they used to call his honour, time back, I suppose?"

"Ay, a very great man indeed. I have heard say he was greater than the count of La Roche himself."

"He thinks so still, no doubt. You cannot get that thought out of a man. But can he build another house? Tell me that."

"It is said not."

"Ha!" ejaculated Etienne again, but still more forcibly.

"The lands of the Bocage are to be given to a stranger," continued the pedlar.

"What! The garden and the sloping woods?"

"To whoever will hire them, and pay the reckoning."

"'Tis a strange tale! Time was when I loved that bit of earth, the flowers, and the very stones that lay upon it."

"Go back there, man, and be happy. You were never born to be a hunter."

"Go back there!" said Etienne, starting back as in a fright.

"Yes, go back there. You are just the person that is wanted."

"When even the fair young mistress is no longer there? She who was called the flower of the Bocage."

"Plant another there."

"It is more easy said than done. We know that two blossoms are not alike on the same stem. And there is not her equal, and never will be."

"What does it matter?"

"It matters just this. There is no one to say, Well done, Etienne."

"I would say it to myself, if I had such good luck."

"You don't know what labour is, man."

"Not after your fashion."

"No, you don't know what sends a man rejoicing to his work, like the lark from her nest."

"He does not know what it is to see a troop of izards making for the far heights, and say, I will reach them ere the day is done," interposed Gaspard.

"No, he only thinks of the bent back and the tired foot along the dusty way," replied Etienne.

"And the day's wages at the end of it," added the pedlar.

"Ah, that's the dirt you pick up by the wayside. But I barter what Providence sends in my way for bread, and my goodwill is the honey to the feast."

"You will not go back to your old haunts," essayed the pedlar once more, as if to try the ground on which he stood.

"To be the great man's slave? No, never!"

"Not for your own sake," drawled out the pedlar. Etienne looked surprised. The pedlar hesitated.

"You would do a poor man a good turn, perhaps," he said, in an insinuating manner, after a moment's hesitation.

"I am poor myself, but I may have something to bestow."

"On my word, I never asked charity in my life. But I might be a richer man if I had any one to say a good word for me. I might be a merchant in a small way, that is, begin by being a carrier of other men's goods."

Etienne was about to reply, but Gaspard put his hand upon his arm, and drawing a small packet from

his breast, displayed the unlucky collar that the pedlar had forced upon Elise, to his utter dismay.

"You know something of this," he said, casting a searching glance upon him. The truth could not be denied.

"Take it back," said Gaspard, roughly, "and make money of it. Why do you cast your pearls by the roadside to tempt others, when you have need of them yourself?"

"A trifle in the way of business;" muttered the pedlar.

"You had better make gain of it in another way than that which you intended," replied Gaspard, in a warning voice; "I know the damsel you would win over to your schemes. She cannot be so easily tempted from her duty."

Etienne rose up, on hearing this, in a state of great excitement. The pedlar rose up too; and there is no saying how the growing altercation might have terminated, had not the timely entrance of the hostess occasioned a momentary pause, during which the pedlar escaped into the outer darkness, and found himself, once more alone with his pack, and the terrors of the bewildering mist. But let us leave him to his own reflections.

Etienne grasped the hand of Gaspard when he was gone, and besought to know the history of the beautiful piece of lace which had given rise to such a burst of feeling in his friend, usually so calm and phlegmatic. The two men looked at one another as only those can do who know that the well-being of each is dear to them. Gaspard loved Elise, and

Etienne knew it. Etienne loved her too, and Gaspard knew it still better ; for it was to his own cost. But there was no rivalry between them. Elise trusted Gaspard as a friend, and had given him this proof of her confidence, that in her distress she turned to him as the person most likely to help her, and to whom she would most willingly confess her error, and her fear lest she should have offended Etienne.

" Give it back to the man if ever you meet him, and till then keep it for me, for I cannot think of my weakness without pain."

" This is what she said to me," said Gaspard ; " but I did not think I should fulfil her errand so soon."

" And what was her motive for accepting it ?" asked Etienne, hesitatingly.

" I will tell you all, for you know how dear her happiness is to me, and to see her happy"—

But here Gaspard's utterance was choked, and a tear stood in Etienne's eye, if not in his own.

" I was at the castle one day. The count had sent for me. I was just going away when Elise ran down stairs. ' Oh, Gaspard,' she said, ' I am in trouble, and there is no one can help me as you can.'

" ' There is no one should know so well how to do so,' I said.

" ' You have ever been a friend to me,' she replied.

" ' And ever will be,' I answered.

She put the lace you saw into my hand.

" ' And what is this ?' I said.

" ' If you see a pedlar with his pack, one that is more sharp and cunning than ever a pedlar was before him, with a smile on his face and a sly word in

his mouth, give it back to him. A slight man he was, and fair, with a weak eye. I do not know how he tempted me to take it. But I could not say nay to him. He was gone, and I found it in my hand.'

" 'He had some design, no doubt.'

" 'Yes, as deep a man as ever breathed; though to look at you would think him as smooth and safe as the lake on a summer's day. I was to speak for him to the Lady Agatha.'

" 'In what manner?'

" 'It is hard to say. I was to imitate him. But I might have known I could never do it.'

" 'Not if you are the child you once were. Not if you tell the truth to every one as you have to Gaspard.' And I looked in her honest face. She was full of her own thoughts.

" 'I was not happy afterwards,' she said. 'This lace was like something that I knew, but was not to speak of. I hid it, and tried to forget it, but it was always coming back to trouble me. Yet I could not say a word for the pedlar, as he desired. We wanted many things from St. Jacques. Why should not this man do for us what Antoine did? I could not say so. It was little to ask, too; but I was silent.'

" 'A poor trade; but he had other views, as we have seen,' Gaspard interrupted his narrative by saying.

" 'Go on,' said Etienne, quietly.

" 'I asked her if this was all her trouble. She did not speak, but the tears kept coming fast. It was not all, I could see. The root of the matter still lay hid. What had induced her to accept the paltry

bribe? She who never had a spark of vanity in her life?"

" 'I was deceived,' she said. 'I deceived myself, too. Did I know, the pedlar said, that the lands of the Bocage were for hire?'"

"The rogue," muttered Etienne.

"Just so. He offered to spread a report, if she would do his errand, that the count wished you to have them, and so the matter would have been easily accomplished."

"Poor child!" murmured Etienne again. "Did she think I could be thus tempted?"

But the cord had not been pulled ineffectually, and Etienne sighed. Perhaps because liberty was so dear to him, and the price was so great at which it must be purchased. When would the value be told?

"I tell you what, Gaspard, you are a freer man than I am. These bonds that women bind us with, one can't shake them off. They keep coming round us again and again."

"You would not shake them off if you could. Thank God for them. They will be a home to you some day."

"It will be a long time first, if I keep to my first love—liberty."

"Why, you are falling from it already."

"Nay, nay, but I am like a divided house; one half rent from the other half."

"Rise up with the dawn, go forth and be a man. Think no more about it."

"I will see Elise some day."

"Ay, some day, but not now."

"You said she was in trouble."

"One that will work its own cure. She has told the truth and will not be long unhappy."

"You will see her for me, Gaspard. I have no token to send but this." And he grasped the hand of his friend again as he said so. The action was a mute acknowledgment of his trust in both.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SHORTEST ROAD NOT ALWAYS THE NEAREST WAY HOME.

"Our heart's roots lie in the soil we have grown on."

IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND.

BUT Etienne had reckoned too much upon his own forbearance. He kept coming nearer day by day to his old haunts, like a man who is being slowly drawn within the influence of some temptation that will, in the end, prove too strong for him. He found himself at length on the verge of the forbidden ground. The lands of the Bocage extended far beyond the more enclosed spot which Grandchamps had chosen for his own peculiar place of abode. They consisted of mountain pastures, of heights and depths, of land cleared for the plough, and such as furnished timber and brushwood for the winter's consumption. Etienne stood and gazed, at a distance, at the land he coveted. To have so much of independence within his reach and not to be able to grasp it. How tantalising!

"If I could go back a few years now, I might do it," he said to himself. "Youth cannot be fettered as

age can. But I am not young enough, and yet too young. To get accustomed to the rub and the sore, I must grow old first. Gaston is the man to do it; Gaston will sow and reap, and gather into his barn. And Etienne may sow and reap too. But Gaston will get kind words. 'Take back so much for Lisette's sake.' And Etienne will get none. 'Dog, fool, pay me that thou owest.' But for poor Elise, why should I think of it?"

Etienne stood still dreaming over the past. He saw Elise, as he had seen her first, a child, free, happy, with an elastic step, her bright soul looking out of her pretty laughing eye, and she all unconscious of the burden of existence. And he saw her again, as Gaspard had described her, cast down, oppressed with a secret longing, the weight of which he felt in his own bosom; and he made a stride, as if to go in the direction of the castle. But how to meet her, in so much suspense, without some tribute to bring of his affection. He would see Gaston first, and know from him the certainty either of the hope or the fear that tortured him. He had not far to go, for Gaston, in another instant, stood beside him.

"What, Etienne!" he said, giving him a slap on the shoulder. "Looking at the old place, are ye?"

"Ay, ay. It brings back many a thought of former days."

"When you and I were not as happy as we might have been. But that's all past and gone with both of us."

"You may say so, Gaston."

"And why not you?"

Etienne was silent a moment.

"I have had many a lonely hour since we last met; I used to think if I could be away upon the mountain top I should never know an uncomfortable thought again. But you don't know what a legion of devils come upon you there, if you have not the peace of God within, as the pastor says; if you are not happy, I mean."

"If you and your musket do not agree as well as you ought."

"Nay now, I have had good sport enough. Ask Gaspard. But I was not in the right mood when I left this place, and therefore liberty has not paid me in her own coin; and you cannot win her fairly if you do not hit her off with as good as she gives you."

"There is some truth in what you say, Etienne, as I have experienced. I am much happier than I was six months ago. I have learned, I hope, how to use my freedom."

"And you have a prop on which to rest your burden. May I ask how the fair lady, your wife, is?" he added, bowing low.

"She is very well, I thank you, and very busy. That is the secret of happiness. And he is the happiest man who can do the hardest day's work amongst us."

"He who can do it without the galling word to drive him on, Gaston, and he whose heart is purged from the remembrance of it. But, as I said before, it is a hell to keep it there. I would I could forget it."

Gaston did not seem to know exactly how to reply, and Etienne said:—

"Do you think his honour and I could ever be friends?"

"You have asked me a difficult question, Etienne."

"And it is one I cannot answer myself," he replied. "But when I came and looked upon these lands again I wished it could be so."

"They are like home to you."

"Yes, and this scorched bush, like my child, that has suffered from my absence."

They had drawn near to the garden and the blackened ruins; the charred timbers, and the fallen roof, and the range of buildings half-destroyed, presenting a mass of deformity that would have pained the eye of any beholder, but much more one that had seen the little homestead in all its former neatness and beautiful proportions. The two so deeply interested exchanged mutual looks of sorrow and almost despair.

"Would you like to have a hand in setting it in order, Etienne?" said Gaston, perceiving, from the drift of their conversation, his yearning towards the scene of his early labours.

"I must make a confession to you," he replied, somewhat abruptly. "I have generally the right notion in my head, but I don't see what is behind till I have looked it through and through a little. I should like to come back here. And why do I wish it? I ask myself; I never thought of it till now. But Elise and I have waited a long time, and we are no nearer the end than we were half a dozen years ago. A man waits patiently while he has hope in the end, but mine is a dry crust at both ends. Will his honour let us make a home here, d'ye think?"

"If he knew his own interest he would do so. Shall I ask him?"

Etienne held his tongue. Now it was come to the asking it seemed a serious matter. But the next instant he exclaimed:—

"No, no, Gaston! What a fool I am! He will never let Etienne part and parcel out his land. He will never let him build his house. The servant where the master should be. No! He will never let Elise be mistress here. Why does he not build his house himself once more? It is not more difficult to do it now than it was at first. But I said he never would."

"He is better where he is," returned Gaston. "He has resigned his stewardship."

"Ha!" ejaculated Etienne, with a sudden, short utterance, peculiar to himself. "Then you are the man to take his place, Gaston."

"I have enough to do already."

"Enough to do! Why, you said just now he was the happiest man who could do the hardest day's work. And I say he can do the hardest day's work that is the happiest. I want a home as you have. There is an unrest about a man which nothing but home will cure."

"Take care it is a happy home, then. Perhaps you might never find it here."

"You are right, Gaston. I might light up a more fiery hell in my bosom than has been there already. But I love this ground, every inch of it, and it is a sad sight to me."

It was indeed a sad sight. They walked over the

singed turf in the garden front, and noted the shrivelled plants and withered flowers by the side of the gravel walk that led to the shrubbery, once the favourite resort of Gaston and Lisette.

"I wish you could come back, Etienne," he said.
"It would, indeed, be the best for all of us."

"The happiness, maybe, would be like a lost piece of copper, that one does not care to find, even if I had Elise to tell my sorrows to. But you will be steward in your father's place."

"No! The count is steward himself now, and paymaster, and everything else into the bargain."

"Better, far better," exclaimed Etienne. "He can give to whomsoever he will, and whosoever will can ask for help."

"But you will come and help me, Etienne, if I undertake so much."

"Why do you ask me?" he replied, with a sarcastic smile. "You know I would help you with all my heart, if I could. But what would Gaspard say? 'Faith, you are only half a sportsman, after all!'"

"Ah, I forgot, Gaspard does nothing by halves."

"No, he must be foremost, and so must I."

And lest he should not remain proof against the temptation, Etienne left Gaston, and turned to go to the castle, an empty-handed lover, and yet more decided than ever to wait for better times. And, ere he had been long gone, another couple came upon the scene, and wandered to and fro. The desolated place was perpetually an object of curiosity and interest to the inhabitants of La Roche; and since its fences had been broken down, it was seldom without

a visitor to wonder and to explore: but the two that came now seemed more inclined to moralize over its fate than to enquire into its future.

"How terrible a fire is!" said Pierre.

"And this the cruelest one I ever saw," replied his servant. "It was the work of an hour, or not much more."

"I wish I had seen it, Davy. I did see it from my window in the castle turret. There were tongues of flame in the midst of the driving smoke, and the sky looked as if it were on fire. But I was too far off."

"You have seen some of the real things of life, or I should have said it would have been too much for your young heart to stand here and see the ghastly work it was. But mine is old and well-worn. I have seen many a village blazing. Yet, somehow, this comes home to one more. We looked on this bauble of a house as a child does on a thing it is not to touch. And now it is gone, smouldered in the dust."

"The accident was like one of the rockets we saw shoot up in the air and fall again. It happened so unexpectedly."

"Yes, like the trumpet-note that says, 'To battle!' But everything seems to happen on a sudden in this world. We plod on, step by step; or, as we soldiers do, we march and counter-march, and then the fight comes. But I say, my young master, we should be on the look-out, though there is one above who turns the wheel of fortune for us."

"What do you mean, Davy? Could Grandchamps have helped the fire?"

"No, but a little foresight and prudence should have taught him not to shut himself up here, and close his heart and his doors as he has done. There was nothing like kindness in him, and nothing that looked kindly about him, except his pretty daughter. He will die a miserable man. If he had only done his duty"—

"That is what you always say, Davy."

"Yes, and I say it again. If Grandchamps had thought how he could best fulfil his duty he would have been upon a throne, for everybody would have helped him and cared for him, and these timbers would have stood upright, instead of lying on their faces, as we see them do."

"Poor man, I am very sorry for him."

"And so am I, but I see how it is, plain enough. He wants, what we all want more than anything, a thought for others as well as for ourselves. And for this reason, it may be, God lets the wheel of fortune turn up many a blank, and there come blanks in life, too, that we must aye be filling up."

But here the man of many vicissitudes paused, thinking upon those that were gone.

"I am too grave for you, I fear," he said, at length, "though you have grown so grave of late. You never ask for a story of the old days now."

"I was thinking of poor Roland, Davy."

"We must take him to a warmer climate this winter."

"He will never be fit for much, I am afraid."

"And if he never does anything more than what he has done, it is enough. He was a comfort to your

poor mother while she lived, and that was his errand in this world perhaps. Jonah's gourd grew up in a night and perished in a night."

"And if he dies, I shall be left alone," said Pierre, sorrowfully.

"We will go back to Switzerland next summer, to your mother's home; you will find friends there, and the good pastor."

"But not a brother, not a father, not a mother."

"No. But were you not talking of being a missionary? Do you know the meaning of the word? It means, one that is sent. One that leaves all for the good cause, as your father did, as we all do if we have one thing at heart, be it good or bad. What if God's mercy takes the 'all' from you first?"

"I did not think it would be so."

"You thought of a home you would return to some day. Like your poor father again! Once you did not understand why he felt it so hard to part from that 'all.'"

"No, Davy, I did not understand what home meant till poor mama died."

"That is true, no doubt. You have never had a settled home. But stay at home now, if you have not the courage to go. Be a missionary in your own land. There is work to be done everywhere. A man needs but be in love with his calling, wherever he is."

"But I should have nothing to say to the people, on this side the water, that they do not know already."

"Ah, that's what it is. One man must work in one way, and one in another; and one in one place,

and another elsewhere, or he cannot work at all. And so Providence flings us abroad in the world, and makes one great human family amongst all nations."

"I dare say I shall be better when I leave this place. I think only of what I have lost here."

"As Grandchamps will be thinking for the rest of his days. And as your poor servant will, when he has done his work."

"But you need not think of that yet."

"I am thinking when you find your wings you will be soon gone, Sir."

"I shall come back and find you an old man, I suppose."

"You must come and seek me by the burnside, then."

"I will, Davy, that I will."

"Unless you are too far off to come. Your home, perhaps, will be on some island in the far ocean."

"On a little island with a coral reef around it, and a grove of palm-trees, where I can build a church."

"Ay, now you speak like yourself again."

They had reached the confines of that country, where Pierre generally arrived sooner or later, whether in conversation or in pursuing his own reflections—dreamland. But let us leave him and follow Gaston from the place where we left him standing when Etienne parted from him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FINDING THE RIGHT TURN.

"—'Forwards,' I say, to suffer and to do."

FREDERICK PERTHES.



E Jeune did not stop to indulge in thoughts of the irrevocable past, he was too much occupied with the active present; and descending the well-known path at a rapid pace, he had nearly reached the village, when he perceived Jeanne Bellecour advancing towards him.

"Well, Jeanne, on your way to the Bocage?"

"And a little further," she replied. "It is pleasant to stroll up here when one's work is done, and see the sun set half an hour later than it does to us in the valley. His honour did right to choose the hill instead of the vale."

"By the look of the sky we shall have fair weather yet, to put winter back awhile," said Gaston.

"A glorious sky, indeed!" she returned, gazing on the crimson hues that were lighting up the mountains far and near.

"We must do something with the stones and the timber that lie scattered yonder, before the snow falls.

I had hoped Etienne would be the man to occupy the house when it was rebuilt."

"I doubt his ever being willing to return here," replied Jeanne, gravely.

"He has wished to do so. I parted from him just now."

"Then he is not the man I took him for."

"He wished to come back to make peace, and for your daughter's sake."

"She is no daughter of mine, if she wishes Etienne to do contrary to what he knows is best. There will be no peace for him here."

"You are right, Jeanne, and he thinks as you do. But where can I find his equal for kindness, a manly heart, and the will to do his duty, as long as flesh and blood permit?"

"Ah, where, indeed? If I did not know his worth I would not let Elise spend her youth, as she does, in waiting for him. But let them wait," she added, firmly.

"You think Etienne will tire of the chase some day?"

"I think Providence waits upon them that wait and work too. I don't think any Providence waits upon my son François." And Jeanne's countenance put on a graver look as she spoke.

"I wish I could make him a steady worker for you. Perhaps he will do better in a new place. I will take him from the sheepfold and set him to work here."

"You are very good both to him and to me, Le Jeune," said Jeanne, with that freedom of speech

which arose out of her independence of soul. "I look back to the time when you and Etienne toiled together, when you had many a hard word, but you laboured on. But François is like a spoiled child, he will not do the thing he dislikes, and therefore he will never do anything well. His father indulged him too much, I fear. He was the youngest, you see, and when Roger died"—

She stopped suddenly and turned away her face. Gaston felt for her, but he could not deny the truth of what she said.

"I have more to do than I can do well, Jeanne, and Lisette too. The vintage is done, but the seed-corn is preparing, and there is plenty of work beside, the drying and the salting of dead stock, and the looking out for winter in a thousand ways. Will you come and help us?"

"Ay, sure. I will leave my loom; and I have not much else to attend to just now."

"There is no one whose services we like better than yours, as you know," continued Gaston, "and you can give us a word of advice sometimes, for we are not growing rich for all our pains."

"But you are getting above dependance," she replied, without noticing the compliment paid to her; "I have heard say his honour has given all his affairs into your keeping."

"The farm in the Val de Fleurs is to be mine, if I make these lands yield their fruit in due season. But I have not made up my mind to accept the bargain. Etienne would have managed them better than I can."

"Etienne will have work of his own to do," said Jeanne, significantly. "Joseph is the man you want. He is one of your own sort, too. He has a cheerful heart and a willing mind."

"But Joseph has never set foot on these lands, that I know of," returned Gaston. "I must have a head as well as a hand to help me."

"He will make the better servant," replied Jeanne. "He has never had an ill word from his honour. You forget how it rankled in your own breast, Le Jeune."

"At least, I have left off thinking about what is past. And there is enough in the future to occupy us all, if we are to repair the losses the storm has brought with it. But God has been very merciful to me, Jeanne."

"And to me above others," she replied.

"Let us be thankful," added Le Jeune, as he inclined his head with a reverential air and moved onwards.

"There will be no lack of men to help now, if he is the master," said Jeanne to herself, as she too went on her way. "But Etienne must not be of the number. Did I not rejoice with him when he was set free? Etienne, said I, you have said 'I will,' long enough. The proud man has said 'I will,' too, and you have done his will. Go, serve your own pleasure! Shall I not be proud to call him my son?"

She pursued her walk up the pathway, through the shrubbery and the garden that once was, by the ruined walls and the projecting angle, at which Antoine had formerly paused at the sight of Lisette,

and down the hill on the other side to the castle, and the castle gate. Jeanne, indeed, arrived at an opportune moment. Elise and Etienne had talked over their troubles long enough. They were beginning to feel disheartened in enumerating the possible years that might still intervene between them and happiness. Elise wept a few tears, and Etienne hung his head and looked gravely into the lengthening future. The little room in which they sat was darkened by the round bastion tower, which projected on one side of the narrow window, and by the rock on the other. The logs that smouldered on the hearth gave a flickering light, sufficient to mark by the flame's occasional brilliancy the deepening gloom; and the sun, which seldom entered this dim apartment, was shedding its last ray on the landscape without.

Jeanne opened the door.

"Oh, mother, are you come?" said Elise, starting up.

What grief is there that a mother cannot console?

"What ails you?" she said. "But I know it all. I need not ask. Come, sit down, children. Let us talk over the matter. So you want to go back to the old place, Etienne."

"I am like a child that wishes for what it cannot have."

"And it is well you should not."

"Perhaps so. But you have seen *Le Jeune*."

"Yes. I met him as I came over the hill."

"He is a man one would be glad to serve."

"And worship too, I sometimes think," said Jeanne.

"But you have another reason for wishing it."

Etienne blushed, and so did Elise.

"I shall think no more about it. Elise and I have agreed to wait."

But the poor girl's tears seemed to contradict the assertion.

"I tell you what, Etienne, there are some wounds we cannot heal; and that sore place in your heart is one. Let it bide. Time and absence will do for it what you cannot. To go back to the spot where you have found so much ill-will would only open the wound afresh. But wait a little longer, Bernard is old now. His heart is fresh, but his limbs are stiff. You know we say, in this country, the one remains young longer than the other."

"And a fine sight it is, to see the young green shoots on the old trunk," responded Etienne.

"But he cannot do much now," continued Jeanne. "I say to him often, Bernard, if I had a son that would help me"—

"Ah, mother," interrupted Elise, "François talks more and does less than ever."

"Yes, child, the mother knows the vacant place in her heart well enough."

Elise looked reproved.

"And God only can fill it," added Jeanne. "But his seat shall not be empty. When François leaves La Roche, Etienne shall have his place."

"Is François leaving La Roche?" they both asked in the same breath.

"He will do so some day. Le Jeune has done his best for him. But when he is a little older he will be his own master, and then adieu François."

"Mother, we do not wish that time to come."

"No. But what I say generally comes true. François will be for getting over the wall and seeing what is on the other side of it. This valley is too strait for him to dwell in. Be content to wait."

"We will, mother," and Elise dried her tears.

"Bernard was always fond of you, Etienne," continued Jeanne, addressing herself anew to her subject. "You used to call him grandfather, you remember. He had always an old look with him. I did not think it was so nigh the truth when you said it."

"I used to love the musket in the chimney corner better than grandfather, I am afraid. You will not take mine from me when I call you mother, I hope."

"Will you serve me and be a son to me then, Etienne, as you love and serve that musket by your side now?" returned Jeanne.

"If I say it, I will do it."

"I know you will. But think on the matter, for you cannot serve two masters. You must learn to say nay to your musket before you wed my daughter."

"Not altogether."

"Perhaps not. Perhaps not so often as if you had been Gaston's helpmeet instead of mine. But think on it, Etienne, for to wed is to say 'I will,' with all your heart, or it ought to be, and young folks do not always think of that. Elise, child, do you hear? Will you do your part, if Etienne does his? Will you give up your lady-ways here, and be a poor man's wife? Will you give up the thing you love best for him?"

"I don't know what that thing is, mother, unless it be Etienne."

"Then follow the chase, my son, till you can say the like of her. You shall have a home with us whenever you come."

"I say it now, mother."

Jeanne got up, and leaving them together, was far on her way back ere she was overtaken by Etienne.

"Let me call you mother from this time forth."

"And you, my son."

A minute or two elapsed before they spoke again. They came near to Duclos' cottage.

"What is the old man doing now?" said Etienne.

"He is starving upon his one idea—money."

"Do you mean that he is getting none?"

"He has lent Rosetta to a man who came this way. A merchant, the same we saw at St. Jacques, I believe. I doubt not he had the money first. But he is down in heart without the creature that has been his only companion of late, and he is afraid of his bargain."

"I wonder he let the man have her. He set such store by her," remarked Etienne.

"He foresaw there would be little for her to do till better times come. But he will repent of it. The poor animal has not been used to the rough passes of the mountains; she will strain herself and come limping home in her old age."

"Then Duclos must starve, whether he will or no."

"He does not think of that so long as he has the money in hand; at least, he cannot bear to be with-

out the getting of it. It is as much his trade as the trade of any man may be."

"He cannot work for his bread."

"And therefore he is the man most to be pitied amongst us."

"Saving his honour, who cannot do it better than Duclos, though he has the use of his limbs."

"You are right, Etienne. He will never be the man he was. And it will be long before La Roche will be the same it was before the day Le Jeune was married. We did not think the bright morning was to change so soon. But a change has come over us, too, for good," she added. "Even the count is changed."

"So I hear," replied Etienne.

"I shall never forget his coming to my cottage before the storm was spent. Our misfortune was the best thing that ever happened."

"It is a pity his honour cannot look upon his mischance in the same light. He might say the same."

"Now don't you be hankering after the old place, Etienne. Joseph is the fitter man for it."

"I would not have let any one say that to me awhile gone."

"But good-will has crept into your heart, as into most others. And Providence fits the time and the circumstance better than we can do it ourselves."

"You think I shall know when the time is come for me to lay by the musket."

"Go take your fill, boy, and reckon time by what you do. There is time enough yet."

“ Grandfather is not old enough.”

“ No, nor François fool enough.”

“ Good night, mother.”

“ God bless you, my son.”



CHAPTER XXX.

THE BEATEN PATH.

"Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening."



HANK God for labour! Many a one does so when he turns from some intolerable grief and plunges into the toils of business; but how few know it for their real good. The poor man seldom counts it a blessing, the rich man, living at ease, never. The proud man curses his humble lot, the humble man labours, eats, drinks, and is satisfied. The wicked man labours for that which is not his, and compasses by craft the fruit of the hateful task he would fain avoid; but the good man accepts it with thankfulness, as the antidote of a greater evil. But some there are, like Etienne, who can only labour for the kind word, and many more, like Antoine, who sink under the yoke of the oppressor, a few, who, like Jeanne, love labour for its own sake, and a very few, who, as the boy-missionary, early see their calling, and work right on to it. These have joy and strength in themselves, the will to carry them on, and something more. Yet who that knows what labour is would add a tithe to its burden, if he could help it?

They say, "There is a pleasure in poetic pains, which only poets know;" there is a joy to the artist and the sculptor when some great idea has struggled into existence, when it has acquired a shape and a name, and a place among the works of art. But who can tell how that idea has abode with its originator, how it has fought its way to the light, with what difficulty it has been separated from the rubbish that encompassed it, and submitted to the influences of earth, air, and sky, ere his presiding genius breathed over it, and made it to live? This idea was a light from heaven perhaps, but it came to dwell in a house of clay, for "we have our treasure in earthen vessels." Who then would not rather give it a helping hand than strangle it in its birth?

But it is not so. The world is selfish and unkind, and commoner spirits are slow to perceive the signs of the true labourer. The man of genius must keep the flame alive by his own exertion, the poor man must stimulate himself by the same rule. But if the cravings of this perishing body are hard to satisfy, how much rather the undying exigencies of the immortal soul!

Ah, smile not ye faithless, despisers of men's small beginnings! Ye know not how the seed was planted, ye know not how it was nursed, ye see but the fruit. Ye know not how the first wish arises in the heart to labour. Be it in the man of science, the discoverer of truths, to benefit mankind. Look how he bends over his work, how it eats with him, companies with him all day, and all night too. He does not know which way his thoughts are tending,

he does not care to know, his one thought is there. You call that man great when his work is proved, you do not know why. He has come to his conclusion by the same road we all travel. By little and little he has journeyed on. Here a step and there another. Some days prosperous, some all clouds and rain. But he has never faltered. His strength has been equal to his day, and he has reached the goal at last. So has the poet who has earned an imperishable fame, so has the preacher when his work is o'er—

“ Servant of God! well done ;

* * *

Enter thy Master's joy.”

So has the soldier, a boy yesterday, a man of heroic deeds to-morrow. His trial was short and sharp, but he has lighted upon rest. So has the meek woman whose daily cares, and toil, and suffering, have made for her a crown of glory. Like Anna, perhaps, sustained by love and affection, she knew not where her strength lay ; but in sorrow and bereavement, it may be, it was revealed to her, as it was to Agatha, what the Divine grafted on the human will can accomplish, “ the victory that overcometh the world.” So does all labour, of the right sort, work for us, if not a reward here in the measure we look for it, in an overflowing measure hereafter.

But some gentle ones there are, who, from their tenderness and susceptibility, can only lie quiet in God's hand, and suffer the current of events to pass lightly over their unresisting will. These have their couch made easy for them, and their passage smooth through life's journey. And, therefore, the little

Roland's worthiest offering was his meek submission, as, like a flower cut from its parent stem that must soon fade away and die, he yielded silently to the weakness which gradually crept upon him, and looking upward, smiled at the thought of heaven, and a father's welcome.

Not long after he had reached a sunnier clime than the valley of La Roche and its dark grim castle could have afforded him during the season of winter, he lay out of doors, surrounded with flowers, and all of nature's best, when the message came to bear him hence. Thus he had his wish. For no earthly tabernacle hindered his immortal spirit; and it might be that he was carried straight up, even into the presence of God.

What further befel Agatha St. Eustace, or what more good the count was permitted to do during his lifetime, is written in the annals of La Roche, though not in this volume.

THE END.